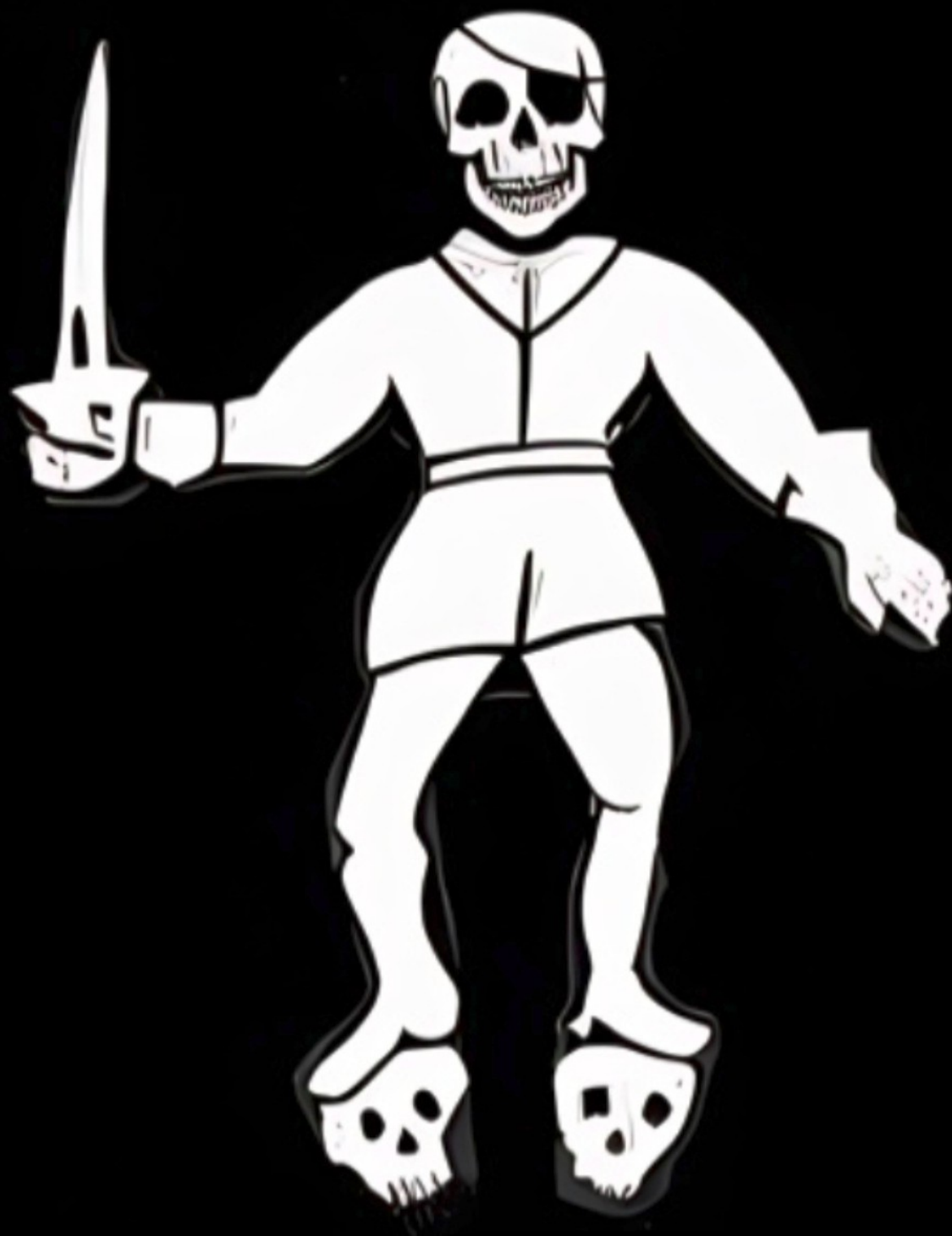


# A Merry Life and A Short One



Essays on Pirates  
and Anarchy

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"A merry life and a short one" is a motto attributed to Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts, the most successful pirate of the Golden Age. He is said to have taken at least 400 vessels in 3 years of activity as a pirate captain before a British vessel off the west coast of Africa shot out his throat and killed him with grapeshot fired from a cannon during a sea battle.

## **Prelude: The Freedom of the Dog**

Day after day, the problems created by political authoritarianism and capitalism, the modern face of civilisation, compound themselves and pile high. Every day I see pleas for help from online accounts where human beings are asking for the basics of life. The queues at food banks get longer, the cries for housing get more numerous, the raising of money for necessary medical procedures increases. The one thing these things, and others like them, seem to have in common (besides them only becoming more numerous and regular) is that relatively few people (to say “no one” here would be strictly inaccurate) ever do anything about them to resolve them – and that includes the people who talk about politics in a seemingly continuous stream as well. It takes quite some brass neck to be complaining about the world from when you wake up to when you go to sleep but yet without seemingly doing anything at all material about it. Is solving such problems merely someone else’s problem? When you can complain about the fact that people lack the basics of life but you consider it someone else’s problem to have and to solve then you have yourself become a problem too.

One bone of contention I have with people in this book, then, is that they are, in general, people who talk much and do nothing. When you say something is “the government’s problem” are you not, thereby, also saying that its NOT yours? Or, in fact, anybody else’s but the government’s? To my mind this attitude is indicative of a problem itself: the problem is that people have become convinced that problems with other people are not their problems, that someone lacking for something basic is not something that they should get involved with. Its a problem I interpret as indicative of a greater problem, however, one from which it grows. This problem is a basic inauthenticity in the vast majority of people, an inauthenticity the dominating powers of the world thrive on.

This quickly moves me along to thinking about Diogenes the Dog, a man who was not meant to be in this book - as it was originally conceived - but who, when inauthenticity raises its head, is there, snapping and snarling, to call it out. You have probably heard of Diogenes, even if only of the name, and that, in itself, is something of a minor miracle when you realise he was no one conventionally important. Diogenes is known for spitting in his host's face (because, he claimed, he could find nowhere worse to spit into), masturbating in the street, carrying a lamp around in daylight hours in a busy marketplace claiming to be looking for a human being, and for telling those wishing to buy him as a slave that his talent was "ruling men". You might gather, then, that Diogenes was not your regular citizen of any society but was a completely self-actualized personality, completely at odds with the very idea of "civilization" and what the idea of civilization necessarily entails.

To get a fresh look at this character whom I have admired across 23 centuries for many years, I decided to read Peter Sloterdijk's appraisal of him in his book *Critique of Cynical Reason*. It should be pointed out before diving into this, however, that "cynical" and "cynic", in its more original Greek sense, does not mean what these words might mean in modern English today. Both words come from the Greek word for "dog", something which was a nickname given to Diogenes himself by the Greeks of Athens in the Fourth Century BCE. Originally, it was as an insult (dogs not being the most civilised of animals) but it came to be taken up by those now identifying as Cynics (I always capitalise the terms in my writing to differentiate them from the modern English usages), including Diogenes himself, as a positive identification. Thus, where others thought to belittle Diogenes and the later Cynics by calling them dogs, the Cynics themselves turned the epithet back on their civilized accusers, thinking of the name in positive terms.

Sloterdijk gives his portrait of Diogenes in that part of his book in which he wants to introduce a few Cynic figures to what is quite a complex text that functions as a Cynical intellectual critique of reason and culture. His wider arguments and interests need not concern us here, however, as his portrait of Diogenes is, by itself, quite sufficient for my purposes. This portrait starts off by disabusing readers of the notion that the many pithy sayings or stories about Diogenes (which are all the “biography” we have of him) are meant to point to a jovial, comic fellow. Consequently, Diogenes “is not at all an idle dreamer in his tub but a dog that bites when he feels like it.” Sloterdijk is at pains to point out that if Diogenes is a dog then it is one with teeth – and one with teeth that work. So whilst one may find oneself smiling at some of his retorts or reported opinions and exploits one should go beyond that to where one finds his jaws have been clamped around some unsuspecting victim’s thigh or forearm. If Aslan is not a tame lion then neither is Diogenes a fawning pet.

Thus, the “humorous approval” of Diogenes for making a funny retort or the smile at some irony in his words or actions “almost always rests on a belittling misunderstanding” according to Sloterdijk. Diogenes is economical with his words and, if he says something, it has a sharp point to it. Diogenes is a person of high standards who, much like the later Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche, is not impressed by inauthenticity or imitation. His words and his practice were so tightly knit as to be indistinguishable from one another. He is looking for those who have the proactivity to take responsibility for themselves and act with constant deliberation. He wants people who own themselves. And this means that civilization itself must be attacked for civilization it is which breeds inauthenticity, conventionality and a lazy lack of regard for the self into human beings. The way of Diogenes is about virtue and ethics that one creates in oneself as a deliberate and purposeful act which is about living in freedom according to nature. Sloterdijk sees him as

“the original father of the idea of self-help” and says that Diogenes does this by distancing himself from the burdens which civilization loads onto people and for which they pay with their freedom. Diogenes is one who links happiness with virtue and a lack of need. But one way to have a lack of need – and the way Diogenes himself epitomises – is to reduce your needs consciously to an absolute minimum. Thus:

*“His spectacular poverty is the price of freedom; that must be understood. If he could be well-off without sacrificing his freedom, he would not have objected at all. But no wise man can let himself be made a fool of by so-called needs. Diogenes taught that the wise man too eats cake, but only if he can just as well do without it.”*

To put this into perspective, it is as well to know that everything Cynics owned they carried with them. If they could not carry it, they got rid of it. There are even stories of Diogenes dispensing with utensils like a spoon and a cup when he finds even simpler alternatives (his hands instead of a cup, a hunk of bread instead of a spoon). Why did Cynics like Diogenes live like this? Out of an unstinting commitment to authenticity and freedom. (Their regular belongings may have been as few as a cape, sandals, a bag to carry things, and a staff.) Having nothing, nothing tied them down. Having nothing, no one had any hold over them. Their argument was that civilization was, in effect, a set of “false weights” which value things incorrectly. Cynics lived as simply as they possibly could and saw virtue in this as it did not rely on an artificially inflated set of “needs” such as civilization inevitably creates. A Cynic would never worry about what curtains or carpets to have, what is on TV tonight or which brand of washing powder gets things whiter. These and similar concerns are the concerns of the civilized and their price is your freedom. The Cynic determines to do without not because without is better or recommended in itself but because this is the only way to demonstrate freedom from

burdensome comforts and artificially created obligations. Civilization, to the Cynic, is unfree; it is a set of chains, and they are not worth giving up your freedom for.

Sloterdijk views Diogenes as a kind of existentialist and this then has a necessarily individualist focus. But it is not a melancholy existentialism; it is seemingly both joyful and peaceful in finding its purpose in simple freedom and the simple, and natural, pleasures of human existence. A pointed tale here is the one in which Alexander the Great comes upon Diogenes in Corinth one day and asks him if there is anything he can do for him. Diogenes replies only by telling him to get out of the way as he is stealing the sunlight that was falling onto him prior to Alexander's arrival. This is one of those stories which can seem for comic effect but it has some bite underneath it, not only in that Diogenes disdains the greatest conqueror then recognised in Western history in the retelling, treating him as just another man, but in that of all Alexander could have granted him – every pleasure civilization could then afford – Diogenes wants only to sunbathe – something for which he needs nothing. And that's how you dismiss the presumptions of civilization in one fell swoop! Sloterdijk argues that this "demonstrates in one stroke what antiquity understands by philosophical wisdom", this being "not so much a theoretical knowledge but rather an unerring, sovereign spirit". The Socratic version of this is the oft repeated "Know thyself". Diogenes very much stands in this line of thinking and acting.

So Diogenes is very much a man of autonomy and he regards this as a matter of appropriate virtue. This contrasts with the "theory" and "custom" of civilization by which "civilized" societies try to force people into regular furrows which are their anointed practices. This autonomy extends to consciously regarding yourself as responsible for your own thinking and education, something seen as a further source of your emancipation. This contrasts, as Sloterdijk puts it, with "the modern intellectual, an

accomplice of the powerful", a person who tries to fit in with his or her society, its thoughts and ways, and is rewarded exactly for fitting in and furthering said civilization's interests (think Stephen Pinker, Richard Dawkins or Jordan Petersen here). This is a becoming powerful by sucking up to the powerful which Diogenes refuses in his answer to Alexander. As Sloterdijk has this:

*"Diogenes' answer negates not only the desire for power, but the power of desire as such. It can be interpreted as an abridgement of a theory of social needs. Socialized human beings lost their freedom when their educators succeeded in instilling wishes, projects, and ambitions in them. These latter separate them from their inner time, which knows only the Now, and draw them into expectations and memories."*

Here, then, Sloterdijk shows how Diogenes' answer to Alexander actually becomes a rejection of civilization, its desires and values, as such, represented, as they are, by the Macedonian.

Diogenes, then, does not wish to be an adjunct to Alexander's civilized power: he refuses it and keeps the freedom of sunlight instead. This reminds Sloterdijk of the saying of Jesus which reminds us of the birds who do no work yet survive and live their lives. (Jesus also mentions the lilies of the field which get their natural beauty without making a worry out of it either.) Sloterdijk then finds both Diogenes and Jesus "united in their irony directed at social labour that exceeds the necessary measure and merely serves to extend power." This hits me with the force of the metaphor of the cog in the machine, something which struck me in my teenage years quite instinctively at the thought that I might have to "get a job" and "work for a living". This, I tell you candidly, always seemed to me like the worst possible idea imaginable and something that I could never understand why anyone



actually did it. This is to say that I instinctively always rejected the complex of social relations in which such a thing ever becomes a necessity and, if I understand Sloterdijk's views of Diogenes and Jesus here, he seems to think that they think the same thing too. (And I agree that they do.) Why, I always asked myself, is my free time less important than my having to earn money for some employer and why, in so very many cases, is people's time regarded as being worth so very little (either per hour or at all)? Here we hit on the utter artificiality and inauthenticity of civilization, not to mention the way it steals personal freedom and replaces it with obligation, often exploitative obligation, justifying it as an "ought" and a "must" along the way.

The problem, from Diogenes' point of view, however, is that the generality of people, the civilized, are not really authentically genuine human beings at all. That's why he got out his lamp in the daytime and started looking for them in the marketplace. Diogenes frequently shows contempt for the civilized and treats them with sarcastic disdain. As Sloterdijk has it:

*"He pursues an idea of humanity that he scarcely finds realized in his fellow human beings. If true human beings are those who remain in control of their desires and live rationally in harmony with nature, it is obvious that urbanized, social human beings behave irrationally and inhumanely. They indeed require the philosopher's light even in daylight to orient themselves in the world."*

Diogenes is then playing the role of "educator of humanity" – and that not necessarily in smooth words and easy lessons but often in sharp witticisms or bites from a dog's jaws. Diogenes sees the civilized as "social cripples, misinformed, addicted beings who in no way correspond to the image of the autonomous, self-controlled, and free individual

according to which the philosopher tries to shape his own life" in Sloterdijk's words. Diogenes the Cynic, we might say, is cynical (now in the modern, English meaning) about the civilized. He cannot abide in the civilized what Sloterdijk refers to as "the spectacle of false living", a description which manages to pull into one neat phrase "the society of the spectacle" of Guy Debord and the existential context that Sloterdijk has himself carved out as an interpretation of Diogenes' life and praxis. Diogenes himself, then, has an earnest attention to the virtue and value of human life as an ongoing activity which does not allow him to look past what he regards as civilization's abject absurdity and virtuelessness and the imprisoned lives that those within it lead.

This "false living" in fact begins with the notion of being of or from a particular place in itself to begin with. Asked about his own home town, so we are told, Diogenes replies with a single word normally translated into English as "I am a citizen of the world". But what can be meant here? Diogenes was in fact from what is now called Sinop on the southern coast of the Black Sea in northern Turkey. He was, it seems, ejected from here at some point after shenanigans that involved defacing the local currency, making it worthless (an activity FULL of metaphorical possibilities!). After this ejection he ends up in Athens and Corinth in southern Greece. His "I am a citizen of the world" can only then be a deliberate choice (which is fitting for the Cynic) and it must have consequences for civilization.

Sloterdijk argues that in such a statement of belonging Diogenes is making reason, reason as he understands it, homeless and separating "true living" from the self-identifying "empirical communities". Sloterdijk further thinks this move has "Utopian significance". Seeing political affiliations as matters of "identity", Sloterdijk argues Diogenes "sacrifices his social identity" for the purposes of saving his "existential and cosmic identity". What

we can say, then, is that he finds more meaning in the concept of a world polity than he does in the concept of a more local, artificially created one. The only true (and therefore valid) order of state Diogenes finds in a polity of all peoples undifferentiated by borders and ethnic classifications (or, indeed, any classifications at all). To choose such a world polity is not to choose any other kind of polity. This makes Diogenes a subversive in any other kind of polity, one who implicitly rejects any validity it may project. It also allows us to suggest that Diogenes also rejects the epistemologies and classificatory procedures upon which such “lesser”, civilized polities are based. Civilization always wants to classify, always wants to create knowledges by which to artificially coerce the things it deems itself to have power over. Diogenes rejects them all and imagines the cosmopolis, the world-city.

One of the most famous facts about Diogenes, already referred to, is that he lived in either a vat, tub, barrel or cistern of some kind. We cannot know exactly what it was but it doesn't matter anyway for the important thing is that a man, subsequently venerated as wise, living in the middle of one of the world's then most advanced cities, Athens, chooses to live there. It was apparently for this reason that Diogenes became known as a dog – for I'm sure we are all familiar with how dogs will themselves curl up in any suitable space and make the best of things, unconcerned by any designation other, more civilized, creatures have given said space in their artificial knowledges of appropriateness. This action of Diogenes is, indeed, a symbolic one, but no less one with practical consequences for him. As Sloterdijk puts it: “he ha[s] freed himself from civilization's chain of needs” in such an action. As previously, the only way for Diogenes to impugn, subvert and deny civilization's ways and, indeed, its valuations of things, is to consciously and deliberately live his life against them. It is not that Diogenes finds value in his domesticated hole but that only by living in such a place can he call other, civilized values into question. This is a having as if

you did not have, a refusing to calculate in ways civilization does, a flexibility of living which accepts all circumstances just the same. Sloterdijk refers to it as a “rejection of the superstructure” where this “superstructure” is what Sloterdijk calls “what civilization offers by way of comfortable seductions to entice people to serve its ends: ideals, ideas about duty, promises of redemption, hopes for immortality, goals for ambition, constructions of power, careers, arts, riches.” Diogenes rejects all these things, preferring the freedom of the dog instead, as a means to subvert the values, and rejecting the compensations, of civilization whole and entire. In this sense, Cynicism is thought of as “the shorter path to authentic life”, one which rejects the imposed needs and circuitous customs of civilization.

Consequently, Diogenes prunes needs from his own lifestyle in order to subvert that of civilization. It is said that he would say “it is divine not to need anything, and semi-divine to only need little” and this is the measure of the man. Diogenes does not place his contentedness in the hands of civilization’s values and so puts himself outside of being judged by, but, more importantly, being inhabited by, them. This is the necessity of being a self-actualized person and taking responsibility for who you shall be upon yourself, not merely as a means of resistance to civilization’s disabling, assimilating values, but as a means to be the kind of person who can live and think for oneself to begin with (for these things are habits which can be encouraged or discouraged by our practices). Numerous discussions of Cynics in classical Greek context will point out that one of the characteristic qualities of the Cynics is *autarkeia* – self-sufficiency. It begins in taking responsibility for yourself, your life, your thinking, your values, as an habitual praxis.

Two further characteristic qualities of the Cynic are “shamelessness” and “bold speech” and they help to constitute what Sloterdijk calls the Cynic’s “existential anti-politics”. This

disregarded a civilization-generated “system of needs”, saw life’s praxis as ethical in every respect and “regarded only embodiment (of practices) as valid”. The Cynic must attack shame head on in this respect. As Sloterdijk himself notes, “What a person really has to be ashamed of is by no means settled by social conventions, especially because society itself is suspected of being based on perversions and irrationalities.” (One thinks here of all those people civilization leaves starving in doorways – at least, the ones it hasn’t covered in spikes so that people must find somewhere else to sleep, cold and hungry.) Cynics are, consequently, people of nature as opposed to custom. Their own reason and nature together direct their path rather than all the wrong motivations which civilization has created and then imposed until they have become irrational and ugly practices, demonstrations of their greed, unfairness, cruelty, vanity, prejudice, blindness and grasping possession. This is why Diogenes masturbates in public, shits where he will, pisses like a dog. Ask him why he does this and he will only reply that the urge to do these things came upon him there and then and so he satisfied the urge as nature intended, there and then, too. Such behaviour literally outrages the civilized, however, in their wish to domesticate the world. Yet here we see most clearly how that domestication deviates from more natural imperatives and nature’s lack of such valuations until said civilization becomes an imperative of civilized oppression in its promulgation of itself.

Diogenes, then, as the Ur-Cynic, must reject civilization’s version of shame. Shame motivates social conformism and it is exactly this Diogenes wishes to discredit. As Sloterdijk says, “If wise persons are emancipated beings, they must have dissolved the internal instances of oppression in themselves.” This is very important and serves to show how external practices help create and actualise our internal mentalities. So, as Sloterdijk continues, “With his public masturbation, Diogenes committed a shamelessness by means of which he set himself in opposition to the political training in virtue of all systems. It was

a frontal attack on all politics of the family, the core of all conservatism.” Sloterdijk, thus, thinks Diogenes sees public masturbation as cultural progress rather than as a regression to the animalistic which any defender of civilization as “superior” would be minded to see it as. But such a civilization is inauthenticity writ large, inscribed upon every human heart, and made the criterion of the civilized. Diogenes, in Sloterdijk’s interpretation, is then the “political animal” – but where this is never seen as a bad thing. It is a serene, joyful and entirely natural thing. It is an authentic, genuine thing. As Sloterdijk goes on to say, “Diogenes, the political animal, raises existential presence of mind to a principle.” This “presence of mind then becomes the secret of survival”, the ultimate flexibility to circumstances in a life attuned to natural, not artificial, imperatives. Needing little, it turns out, is the best way of coping with life in an uncertain world which may turn harsh at any moment. In choosing this way, Diogenes, and the Cynics who came after him, rejected civilization’s way which was, and still is, an attempt to coerce, domesticate and control the world into an artificial pattern of its own making, an activity still subject to nature (however much it seeks to turn the tables on it) and which is doomed to spectacularly fail, not least due to the very inauthenticity which is both its foundation stone and inherent to it.

But so much for the history lesson - even though it reminds me that, for a while now, I have seen myself as my very own Diogenes with a metropolitan “Athens” all around me. The things civilization seems to value – the attention-seeking superficiality of corporate and social media, the empty spectacle of corporate entertainment whilst, outside, people are literally starving to death, the attempted provision of a corporate product for every imaginable (and often falsely created) human need without thought for its environmental cost, the veneration of authority, property and commerce – both sickens and disgusts me. I feel as a stranger in such a world. The corporate metropolis has long since kicked ethics –

a Cynic concern – to the kerb along with the roadkill and those human beings it has discarded there and now wilfully ignores, a warning to the rest of human society not to risk becoming like them. Primarily what is sick about the metropolis here is how it has gone about inculcating its values into successive generations of people with military purpose and precision. I choose this metaphor deliberately for such inculcation has been a matter of violence and domination. Civilization absolutely does not say that each one of us living in it will be successful. But it wants us to imagine we can be and, crucially, it wants to get to define what success is, to define how it is achieved, to make the rules, to police both it and you. Oppression always starts with values and if you have been forced to accept someone else's then its almost certainly not to your advantage and definitely not to everyone's. Civilization then works by making you feel guilty for not being a success on its terms if you aren't and by making you think yourself better than those who aren't if you are.

So I find myself in "Athens", wandering about the marketplace, looking for a human being. Like Diogenes, I struggle to see any. Its just a consistent stream of inauthentic person after inauthentic person, meatpuppets worked from the inside by a civilization they haven't even accepted as normal - because it never occurred to them to think about it at all. Success is thought of in terms of acquisition and possession – a home, a car, foreign holidays, a house full of things, a nice phone that is always renewed once a new model is available. People can be, and are, judged by what they do and don't own. People with a mansion or five and an ocean-going yacht are imagined to have really won at the game of civilization. Being famous becomes a goal because said fame might bring you riches and possessions. This is civilization and its all total shit. Such civilization relies on you being prepared to sell your authenticity and your freedom for its own empty trinkets and a place in its own hierarchy of value. And as you take part in it so the whole contextualises

and coerces everyone else to play too. Civilization is a mass delusion and the more people unthinkingly accept it the harder it becomes for others to resist it. One by one, we all become more and more unfree, colonized by values that incarcerate us in a prison of the civilized.

Now I am in the anarchist tradition and I am one who happens to believe that the Cynicism Diogenes inaugurated is itself an early form of what later people would term anarchism. I have argued at more length for that linkage elsewhere but what matters to me today, as I sit in my own tub contemplating the unethical metropolis which follows people on social media famous for having a big bum in their millions whilst, not a mile or two down the road, other human beings starve, is how we can take the tenets of anarchism, individual as well as social, and subvert this civilization so that it becomes a more ethical anarchy. I take it as read that this subversion, something I denominated an anarchist value in itself in a previous book, is absolutely necessary for, in my intellectual analysis of the situation, it is civilization or anarchy; one or the other – for one must drive out the other. They cannot occupy the same space (although, in some sense, they always both exist at the same time as possibilities).

In that other book, my own take on anarchism I called *Being Human* (since even then the Cynic narrative was prominent in my mind), I made a kind of twofold case for an anarchist anti-civilizationalism and I did so by pointing out that this was a matter of both the internal and the external, our thinking and our acting. It can, in fact, be no other for, by now, civilization is not just a way of organizing people but a set of destructive values implicit in human existence. It is something within each one of us who are born to civilization and which we must cast out or divest ourselves of in order to function in other, better ways. The first six chapters of *Being Human* were attempts to show how thought is



itself a fictional, constructed thing and not unavoidable or necessities it is impossible to sidestep. The second half of the book was then largely examples of people with practices who contradicted the verities of civilization in their very habits and impulses. It will be noted by readers of the book that the examples I chose there – Jesus of Nazareth, John Cage, Alan Moore and Emma Goldman – are all very different. But that is because anarchism is not a new imperative you must fall in line with but a set of values you can interpret as you may. In anarchy the prevalent value is freedom, social as well as personal. In civilization it is control. All four of my examples have so shaped their minds that their actions cannot but lead in directions subversive of civilization and insurrectionary against it.

The anarchist, then, is one who comes to view civilization as a cage in much the same way as the Cynic Diogenes did. The anarchist seeks social organization, economy, ecology, which leads to more freedom for more people and not less. The anarchist has an ethics of freedom, an ethics which values freedom more highly than it values conformity, an ethics which values autonomy more highly than it values control. Where civilization wants possession, acquisition and coercion, anarchy wants sharing, cooperation and solidarity. Anarchism is not only a new way to organise relationships, one hopeful of screening out exploitation, oppression and domination, it is a completely different way to think and to value as well. This being so, IT CANNOT RESULT IN THE SAME WORLD BY DIFFERENT MEANS. The first thing the anarchist (or anyone else) must realise is that the set of relations that anarchism creates is not the world of civilization. Anarchism must deconstruct this world; it must annihilate and obliterate it; its thinking and values must make it subsequently impossible even to contemplate. Anarchism is (and must be) civilization's kryptonite.

The question then becomes how we get there and in *Being Human* I only hinted at this in my final chapter, subsequently filling this out a little more in a pamphlet I wrote together with Lara Nasir entitled *Building Communities and Defeating Capitalism*, a pamphlet about the need for an anarchism of mutual aid as an alternative to the hierarchical, oppressive means of interaction a capitalist civilization has to offer. What this book is to be about is filling out much more of those ways and the values that are important in motivating them and showing what they look like in the example of people who really existed (and perhaps sometimes still do exist). Make no mistake here though: I do not underestimate my task for, like Diogenes, I perceive that there are few people indeed who are in a position to receive them, such is the consistently destructive and violent work civilization has done colonizing people's minds and filling them with poisonous dross that clouds the vision and fogs the mind. You will not have to look far even today to find self-styled "left radicals" who think civilization itself can be reformed to make it more benign and less oppressive. The first assertion of this book, then, is to refute this and say that it cannot. It is a matter of civilization's controlling, domesticating inauthenticity or anarchy's liberatory, autonomous authenticity. YOU MUST CHOOSE. In this book I choose the destination of anarchy by means of the path of anarchistic piracy and, in what follows, I intend to set out both the how and the why of that.

## **Pirates (as Anarchists?)**

Within the last several years I've become quite interested in various images which, in original form, would be commonly described as "pirate flags" - perhaps things better known as "the Jolly Roger". This is a design, of several similar ones (often featuring some formation of skull and cross bones), which pirates flew from their masts in days of yore. (There is an example of one I have designed, based on authentic ancient pirate flags, on my front cover.) This activity, and my fascination with its iconography, led to me thinking more about the association of pirates with anarchists, an association which, doing diligent research, has some body of scholarship behind it. (This includes interesting and authoritative work by private and public scholars who are noted anarchists themselves as in Peter Lamborn Wilson's well received book about the Barbary pirates - especially those of Rabat-Salé in Morocco - and the final book David Graeber was working on before his untimely death which covers the myths, legends and actuality of the pirates of his beloved Madagascar.) Besides these books, scholars who are not anarchists at all (although in former times some of them may well have been socialists or Marxists and the trope of a "Marxist history" is not an unknown one) have also written histories of piracy which want to link in the phenomenon of piracy to political narratives about the world of the day and so "make sense" of it as not only a historically contingent but also a convincingly political act.

I will be paying attention to such histories of pirates and piracy in what follows for it is certainly the case that pirates can be put, and seen, in political context. Some, in fact, would suggest that this is an absolute necessity in order to make sense of them and it may even be the case, as Gabriel Kuhn asserts in his book to be discussed below, that there are "things radicals can learn" from historical pirates as a result. In fact, it turns out

we need to consider such questions quite deeply so what follows will not simply be the recitation of a synthesised "cod history" of the pirates. There are any number of books by people paid to write such things for those who want them. In this text, however, I want to especially focus on that relation of pirates to anarchists and piracy to anarchy. This, of course, involves asking who the actual historical pirates were, how they lived and what they did, what their "politics against politics" was. But it also involves asking what anarchy is and what an anarchist is. This, I imagine, is no bad thing though for I often come across people who seem to have forgotten - or perhaps never even knew to begin with. Perhaps this little book discussing so-called "an-argh-chy" will then remind them!

I begin with Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's book, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. This book, which won the International Labor History Award, is written by two American Marxist historians and deals with the "many-headed hydra" of forces from "dispossessed commoners, transported felons, indentured servants [and] religious radicals" to "pirates, urban laborers, soldiers, sailors, and African slaves" which those states that were beginning to build empires, designate territories and so create capitalism had to deal with in the process of so doing. The book, as one might expect of Marxist historians, wants to tell their story in the midst of this process and describe their history as connected, a matter of politics and economics and not merely contingent events. Since I am here interested in pirates specifically I shall focus especially on this in what they have to say but, as is the nature of their argument in this book, I cannot just excerpt pirates from history and talk about them in the abstract. Linebaugh and Rediker, in fact, write in such a way as to make this impossible and they imbue historical piracy as a phenomenon with socio-political value and meaning coming directly out of their time and place in history, and their

circumstances, which we shall be forced to consider as a result. Pirates existed, in other words, when and as they existed, for specific historical reasons.

Consequently, I start not at sea aboard some pirate ship but in what was then a village called Putney just outside London, England, during the later years of the English Civil War. It was here that the so-called Putney Debates took place as the New Model Army decided what they wanted to do about their victory over the English royalists. By far the most radical of those who took part in these debates was the New Model Army officer, and *de facto* leader of the faction known as "The Levellers", Thomas Rainsborough. He advocated:

*"law in the English language (proceedings had up to then been in Latin), the right to call witnesses, the right to a speedy trial, equality under the law, no impressment [the practice of forcing people into military or naval service, often without notice], religious toleration, jury trials, no double jeopardy, the right to confront accusers, and the abolition of capital punishment for theft. He emphasized the sovereignty and rights of 'the poorest he that is in England,' and was aware of the 'many scufflings between the honest men of England and those who have tyrannized over them.' One of these scufflings concerned the denial of access to the commons, which to Rainsborough was the 'greatest tyranny that was thought of in the world.' The gentry 'turned the poor men out of doors'—that is, evicted them. Defending the popular right to the commons and the subsistence they afforded, Rainsborough claimed that 'God hath set down that thing as to propriety with this law of his, Thou shalt not steal.'"*

The disputes of the English Civil War are often popularly and vulgarly painted as disputes between those who stood for the royal right of power and those who stood for

parliamentary rights of power, with the latter being imagined more "democratic" than the former. But the Putney Debates revealed the so-called "grandees" of the parliamentarian side to be rather more interested in feathering their own nests than sharing out the power between everyone. Thus, people like the Leveller Rainsborough or even the Digger, Gerrard Winstanley (whom I discuss at length in other books), stood out as radicals pushing agendas that went far too far for those at the top of the New Model Army. Although these were very much against royalist pretensions, they didn't want every man to have the vote instead. What, as one Colonel expressed it, if these people then voted for "an equality of lands and estates"? Heaven forbid!

This was historically the time when "the commons" - once a term which meant unused land in general - provided the necessary territory for subsistence farming and so subsistence living. But times were changing and landowners, or those with riches and pretensions to be even bigger landowners, were coming round to the practice of farming for profit and what would become something done on an industrial basis. For this they needed LAND and that land wasn't going to be forthcoming if it was regarded as commons. This, as readers of seventeenth century history will come to realise, was exactly what animated Gerrard Winstanley with his belief that the earth was "a common treasury", a phrase often repeated in his writings. But at this time the power of property and privilege was coming into conflict with that of the mass of people and the commons because there was the basis and reality of capitalism to be created through state power, private ownership of property and the coercion of people to work. What Linebaugh and Rediker say about this is that, in the Putney Debates, what was at issue was "a future with the commons and without slavery, or... one with slavery and without the commons."

General readers might not realise that the Levellers of the English Civil War period were anti-slavery but this was very much an active issue for the slaves were not merely captured Africans (North Africans or "Turks" would capture Europeans as their own slaves too) but many kinds of English people themselves through practices of "impressment" or press-ganging, not to mention the "spiriting" or kidnapping (which, originally, was literally as it sounds - stealing children) which might see people forcibly taken and sent across the Atlantic to colonies where they would be set to work, assuming they survived the journey, in back-breaking tasks which would kill a fair percentage more of them soon enough as well. Slaves were literally used as "human resources" (a phrase we know in another guise today) and the slave masters were not afraid to work the slaves to death as more could always be procured one way or another. Slavery at this point was not uniquely about race but it was about who could be captured and pressed (i.e. literally forced) into service. The Levellers spoke out against all of it in the face of a nascent capitalism and empire which needed manpower to do its work for it (as it always has and always will until robot, i.e. slave, armies which can do all the human work have been constructed, at least).

To this context of Putney, Linebaugh and Rediker add the Naples rebellion of 1647 and the Diggers who began their activities in 1649. The issues here were similar: the commons, or increasing lack of them, slavery, class or privilege, the possibility of common liberty. This, of course, was also the time of Thomas Hobbes, soon to deliver his *Leviathan* to the world, and, later, of John Locke, who would discourse on the right of some people to take away what other people had because they could improve it and make use of it in ways others could not (something such people imagined GAVE THEM THE RIGHT to take things away from others). The seventeenth century was that century in which the state came into its own as we know it now and in which capitalism began to find its feet as an exploitation of private property for private wealth production which required to

manipulate and exploit people generally in order to produce it. Naturally, then, who had power to do what, the supremacy of the state, the rights of human beings (or the lack of them), how society basically functioned, what belonged to who and why, how populations could be controlled, were basic and increasingly important matters of the time.

A signature event of this time period, then, might be the new English republic's action to end the activities of the Diggers on George's Hill in which the state propagated a military intervention on behalf of private property. Its interesting that, retrospectively, Linebaugh and Rediker see this as a matter of "the commons or slavery" but, of course, they are right to do so. If one has "commons" then one can subsist based on one's own labour without need for wealth. One life, as a matter of something that exists at a subsistence level, requires only the resources you have to hand and can maintain for yourself. People did this worldwide for centuries, millennia, in fact. But enclosure, private acquisition of land and wealth and the desire to produce more, made this increasingly impossible. Put very simply, if you don't have land to survive upon, if your access to basic resources is blocked by force, then your survival is put into the hands of others and you are made reliant upon them. This was exactly the issue as the Diggers saw it. Gerrard Winstanley then "opposed slavery, dispossession, the destruction of the commons, poverty, wage labour, private property, and the death penalty." His plan was an urging of the "common people" to take their lives into their own hands, before it was too late, on common land. The State saw his ploy for what it was, however, and stamped it out definitively before it could go too far. As Winstanley saw it, the problem was simple: "The teeth of all nations hath been set on edge by this sour grape, the covetous murdering sword." As a consequence, he advocated for a worldwide proto-communism which even Lenin would later recognise as such.



This might seem like a strange background to a piece of writing that's meant to be about pirates - but perhaps, historically, pirates weren't exactly the people you see portrayed in movies produced by Disney (a company who, whilst trying to profit vastly from films about domesticated pirates, are horrified by the actions of modern digital pirates to harvest and profit from their content for themselves). In reality, however, this political introduction, when fleshed out further, makes some sense. To do this, we need to set sail and go to sea. But to do that you need a navy. By the seventeenth century Europeans had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and found India. Others, heading west across the Atlantic, had found the Caribbean islands, North, Central and South America. One or two had even circumnavigated the globe. Europeans were thus well aware that other places existed and that these places had things they did not have. What's more, these places could be imagined as either markets to trade with or places to conquer. But to do that you need a navy and you need people to go there and get what you want.

Consequently, Linebaugh and Rediker describe a two-fold development: "the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below." This also relates to the term "hydrarchy", a term which highlights the importance of controlling the seas at this point in history for European empires (and others) who used the sea for trade and to increase their own colonial influence upon the world (something else which would help them to establish economically profitable footholds at various points of the globe). The ship, as these historians then point out, "became both an engine of capitalism in the wake of the bourgeois revolution in England and a setting of resistance, a place to which and in which the ideas and practices of revolutionaries defeated and repressed" could continue to exist and circulate. In other words, it is the argument of Linebaugh and Rediker that exactly the concerns our people's revolutionaries had had on land, would also find their way to sea and rise up in the form

of pirates and piracy. Not just guys with eyepatches, wooden legs and a parrot that would say "pieces of eight" on demand, pirates were about a lot more than simple greed. Because of this, they would come to pose the age's deadliest threat to the nascent capitalism of European empires - which, of course, would be their undoing in the end.

Thus, the situation at the time is that "The seizure of land and labor in England, Ireland, Africa, and the Americas laid the military, commercial, and financial foundations for capitalism and imperialism, which could be organized and maintained only through... the maritime state." England in the time of Cromwell, however, did not have many ships and there were other colonial powers (particularly the Dutch, the Spanish and the French) who were out there competing for new territories and their resources. A war was on for control of the Atlantic. Cromwell thus had to swiftly act to vastly increase his navy both in terms of ships and sailors (requiring both a merchant navy and a Royal Navy). Shipping, it is very important to understand, was seen as the key way to increase economic power by such states at this point in time. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, English trade would consequently rise by several percent a year, every year.

Who, however, was going to volunteer to serve aboard the ships that carried out all this activity back and forth across the Atlantic? The answer to that is that a lot of the people did not "volunteer" at all. They were simply "impressed" - which means forcibly taken - and made to be sailors on pain of death. The life of a sailor at this time was no picnic. Food on board ship was scarce and might sometimes run out. (There were no shops or telecommunications in the seventeenth century. One simply had to take what one needed when they left port. If it ran out, it ran out.) Pay was hard to come by and it wasn't unknown that sailors might wait ten years to be paid. There was also disease which was often rife (and not just scurvy for lack of vitamin C!). Yet, by the same token, the penalty

for desertion was death and the sailors, hardly the happiest bunch to begin with, were treated to violent discipline within a very hierarchical social structure to keep them at their task in service of king (or queen) and country. Then there is the fact that one navy might meet that of another whilst at sea and cannon fire might be exchanged, sinking your ship at sea. Add to that that these ships might often be transporting slaves to some recently discovered land to work there on various plantations. As we can see, from the beginning capitalism was the coercion and exploitation of human beings for the generation of privately accumulated profit. That power parliaments and sovereigns claimed to have won at the price of human lives. The architects of this system did not think of the people they were using up morally, they were simply imagined as resources at the State's disposal. By the end of the seventeenth century England's Royal Navy was "England's greatest employer of labor, its greatest consumer of material, and its greatest industrial enterprise." It was used to defend merchant shipping and colonies and to attack such opponents as dared to show their faces. Essentially, it was a force deployed to create watery enclosures much as enclosure had been taking place on land.

Consequently:

*"By the last half of the seventeenth century, capitalists had organized the exploitation of human labor in four basic ways. The first of these was the big commercial estate for the practice of capitalist agriculture, whose American equivalent was the plantation, in many senses the most important mercantilist achievement. Second was petty production such as the yeoman farmer or prosperous artisan enjoyed. Third was the putting-out system, which had, in Europe, begun to evolve into the system of manufactures. In Africa and the Americas, European merchants put out firearms, which were used by their clients to capture people (to sell as slaves), to kill animals (for their furs), and to destroy a wealth of common*

*ecologies. The fourth means of organizing the exploitation of labor was the mode of production that united all of the others in the sphere of circulation—namely, the ship."*

The first and last here were the most hierarchical and, consequently, most violent of these four organisations of human labour. The ship itself, as already noted, would become the essential engine of what was by then a trans-national commercial enterprise and was, as a result, the "machine of empire", that which made empire possible. But here we must pay attention to those unfortunate sailors (of several nations) again:

*"Since conditions aboard ship were harsh and wages often two or three years in arrears, sailors mutinied, deserted, rioted, and altogether resisted naval service. Over and against these chronic struggles for freedom and money, the state used violence and terror to man its ships and to man them cheaply, preying often on the poorest, most ethnically diverse populations. The press-gang, which swaggered to brutal prominence during the 1660s, swung bigger sticks in the 1690s as the demand for maritime labor continued to swell. For sailors, the press-gang represented slavery and death: three out of four pressed men died within two years, with only one in five of the dead expiring in battle. Those lucky enough to survive could not expect to be paid, as it was not uncommon, writes John Ehrman, the pre-eminent scholar of the navy of the 1690s, for a seaman to be owed a decade's wages. The figure of the starving, often lame sailor in the seaport town became a permanent feature of European civilization, even as the motley crew became a permanent feature of modern navies.*

*The dynamic of manning was different in merchant shipping, but the outcome was similar. As the conditions of seafaring life ebbed and flowed, as hard discipline, deadly disease, and chronic desertion thinned the ranks of the ship, the captain would take on sailors wherever*

*he could find them. The ship became, if not the breeding ground of rebels, at least a meeting place where various traditions were jammed together in a forcing house of internationalism."*

Consequently, official navies, whether merchant or military, were full of miserable sailors from many places, many of whom didn't want to be there and who had been put there in the first place against their own will. But it was that or risk death in an act of desertion (which many attempted nevertheless). Sailors, in fact, would often swap sides and it was not impossible that an English sailor might fight for the English, French, Dutch and Spanish (or even for Barbary sailors against all of these and Christendom itself) during his lifetime. These countries also employed what we might think of as "state licenced pirates" to act as freelancers acting on their behalf, ships that would exist to attack the shipping of competitor empires on the high seas. This is where we get "corsairs" or "buccaneers" from, in fact. The ship was then the only means of communication across vast watery empires but also the place where people "from below", if we might put it like that, would meet their own kind from other nations. This, as Linebaugh and Rediker have it, acted as a means to circulate revolutionary social ideas and to teach those who found themselves at sea that just because they came from different lands it did not mean that their interests were different.

Ironically, then, it was because those in authority in various acquisitive fledgling European empires wanted to create vast naval forces to accumulate wealth from new territories that they brought together thousands of (often reluctant) sailors for the first time. What would happen if these men ever decided that they didn't want to work for a government interest any more but that they did want to work for themselves? That's how you get pirates. However, as Linebaugh and Rediker note:

*"The process [of this proletarian and oppositional organisation] was slow, uneven, and hard to trace, not least because the alternative order of the common sailor was decapitated almost every time it reared its head, whether in mutiny, in strike, or in piracy. It took a long time for mariners to get, as one man put it, 'the choice in themselves'—that is, the autonomous power to organize the ship and its miniature society as they wanted. The sailor's hydrarchy went through several stages, appearing most clearly—and, to the authorities, most threateningly—when sailors organized themselves as pirates in the early eighteenth century."*

When piracy proper began, then, it was not as the state-sanctioned piracy it had once been, the piracy which was there to serve one empire by attacking others. Piracy proper was a self-organisation of renegade, guerrilla sailors for their own self-determined goals, a piracy that served the group and no outside, third party interest. It was, in a general sense, "anti-politics" by creating its own politics. Consequently, "when seamen—as pirates—organized a social world apart from the dictates of mercantile and imperial authority and used it to attack merchants' property (as they had begun to do in the 1690s), then those who controlled the maritime state resorted to massive violence, both military (the navy) and penal (the gallows), to eradicate piracy." If this does not remind you of Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers on land then it should - for it is essentially the same thing: people arbitrarily imagining the right to make their own lives on their own terms and for their own survival – an anti-politics that combats regular politics. In both cases, states were never going to allow that and they were never going to allow those they had coerced and manipulated on land and sea to suddenly strike blows for their own freedom which might ignite across the whole political landscape, ending economic relationships as they were currently proceeding (and being State-directed to proceed) forever. The Levellers themselves, in fact, in their writings had said that "We doe not impower them to

impreste or constraint any person to serve in war by Sea or Land every man's Conscience being to be satisfied in the justness of that cause wherein he hazards his life, or may destroy an others." It is the submission of Linebaugh and Rediker that such attitudes were fundamental to that of the sea-going pirates of the later seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, attitudes which made pirates and piracy oppositional to the ideas which justified State power and commerce just as both the Levellers and Diggers had before them.

Linebaugh and Rediker tell the story of the formation of the first pirates of this "revolutionary era" (i.e. the late seventeenth century and beyond) as follows:

*"The struggles waged by sailors of the revolutionary era for subsistence, wages, and rights and against impressment and violent discipline first took autonomous shape among the buccaneers in America. Even as buccaneering benefited the upper classes of England, France, and the Netherlands in their New World campaigns against their common enemy, Spain, common seamen were building a tradition of their own, at that time called the Jamaica Discipline or the Law of the Privateers. The tradition, which the authorities considered to be the antithesis of discipline and law, boasted a distinctive conception of justice and a class hostility toward shipmasters, owners, and gentlemen adventurers. It also featured democratic controls on authority and provision for the injured. In fashioning their hydrarchy, the buccaneers drew upon the peasant utopia called the Land of Cockayne, where work had been abolished, property redistributed, social distinctions levelled, health restored, and food made abundant. They also drew on international maritime custom, by which ancient and medieval seafarers had divided their money and goods into shares, consulted collectively and democratically on matters of moment, and elected consuls to adjudicate differences between captain and crew.*

*The early shapers of the tradition were those whom one English official in the Caribbean called the 'outcasts of all nations'—the convicts, prostitutes, debtors, vagabonds, escaped slaves and indentured servants, religious radicals, and political prisoners, all of whom had migrated or been exiled to the new settlements 'beyond the line.' Another royal administrator explained that the buccaneers were former servants and 'all men of unfortunate and desperate condition.' Many French buccaneers, such as Alexander Exquemelin, had been indentured servants and before that textile workers and day laborers. Most of the buccaneers were English or French, but Dutch, Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian, Native American, and African men also joined up, often after they had in one way or another escaped the brutalities of the Caribbean's nascent plantation system.*

*These workers drifted to uninhabited islands, where they formed maroon communities. Their autonomous settlements were multiracial in nature and organized around hunting and gathering—usually the hunting of wild cattle and pigs and the gathering of the King of Spain's gold. These communities combined the experiences of peasant rebels, demobilized soldiers, dispossessed smallholders, unemployed workers, and others from several nations and cultures, including the Carib, Cuna, and Mosquito Indians."*

Your classical late seventeenth or early eighteenth century pirate was then essentially one who, instead of being part of a land-based "maroon community", had taken his place in a "multiracial maroon community" at sea. He became part of a revolutionary, oppositional and anti-political culture which had plenty of reasons to hate states and navies and mercantile economic interests. Linebaugh and Rediker argue, after others to be sure, that this was a "world turned upside down" not least based on the "articles of agreement" the pirates established between and for themselves quite consensually. In a



long quotation it will be helpful to quote here in full, just exactly what the pirates were about is made plain:

*"Pirates distributed justice, elected officers, divided loot equally, and established a different discipline. They limited the authority of the captain, resisted many of the practices of the capitalist merchant shipping industry, and maintained a multicultural, multiracial, multinational social order. They sought to prove that ships did not have to be run in the brutal and oppressive ways of the merchant service and the Royal Navy. The dramatist John Gay demonstrated his understanding of all this when, in 'Polly', he had Macheath disguise himself as the black pirate named Morano and sing a song to the tune of 'The World's Turned Upside Down.'*

*The pirate ship was democratic in an undemocratic age. The pirates allowed their captain unquestioned authority in chase and battle, but otherwise insisted that he be 'governed by a Majority.' As one observer noted, 'They permit him to be Captain, on Condition, that they may be Captain over him.' They gave him none of the extra food, the private mess, or the special accommodations routinely claimed by merchant and naval captains. Moreover, as the majority gave, so did it take away, deposing captains for cowardice, for cruelty, for refusing 'to take and plunder English Vessels,' or even for being 'too Gentleman-like.' Captains who dared to exceed their authority were sometimes executed. Most pirates, 'having suffered formerly from the ill-treatment of their officers, provided carefully against any such evil' once they were free to organize the ship after their own hearts. Further limitations on the captain's power were embodied in the person of the quartermaster, who was elected to represent and protect the interests of the crew, and in the institution of the council, the gathering that involved every man on the ship and always constituted its highest authority.*

*The pirate ship was egalitarian in a hierarchical age, as pirates divided their plunder equally, levelling the elaborate structure of pay ranks common to all other maritime employments. Captain and quartermaster received one and one half to two shares of plunder; minor officers and craftsmen were given one and one quarter or one and one half; all others got one share each. Such egalitarianism flowed from material facts. To merchant captains it was galling that 'there is so little Government and Subordination among [pirates], that they are, on Occasion, all Captains, all Leaders.' By expropriating a merchant ship (after a mutiny or a capture), pirates seized the means of maritime production and declared it to be the common property of those who did its work. Rather than working for wages using the tools and larger machine (the ship) owned by a merchant capitalist, pirates abolished the wage and commanded the ship as their own property, sharing equally in the risks of common adventure.*

*Pirates were class-conscious and justice-seeking, taking revenge against merchant captains who tyrannized the common seaman and against royal officials who upheld their prerogative to do so. Indeed, the 'Distribution of Justice' was a specific practice among pirates. After capturing a prize vessel, pirates would 'distribute justice' by inquiring about how the ship's commander treated his crew. They then 'whipp'd and pickled' those 'against whom Complaint was made.' Bartholomew Roberts's crew considered the matter so important that they formally designated one of their men—George Willson, who was no doubt a fierce and lusty man—the 'Dispencer of Justice.' Pirates roughed up and occasionally executed captured captains; a few bragged of their avenging justice upon the gallows. Pirate captain Howell Davis claimed that 'their reasons for going a pirating were to revenge themselves on base Merchants and cruel commanders of Ships.' Still, pirates did not punish captains indiscriminately. They often rewarded the 'honest Fellow that never abused any Sailors' and even offered to let one decent captain 'return with a large sum of*

*Money to London, and bid the Merchants defiance.' Pirates thus stood against the brutal injustices of the merchant shipping industry, with one crew's even claiming to be 'Robbin Hoods Men.'*

*Pirates insisted upon their right to subsistence, the food and drink so often denied aboard the merchant or naval ship—the very shortage that led many sailors to go 'upon the account' in the first place. One mutinous sailor aboard the George Galley in 1724 responded to his captain's orders to furl the mizzen-top by saying, 'in a surly Tone, and with a kind of Disdain, So as we Eat so shall we work.' Other mutineers simply maintained that 'it was not their business to starve,' and that if a captain was making it so, hanging could be little worse. Many observers of pirate life noted the carnivalesque quality of its occasions—the eating, drinking, fiddling, dancing, and merriment—and some considered such 'infinite Disorders' inimical to good discipline at sea. Men who had suffered short or rotten provisions in other maritime employments now ate and drank 'in a wanton and riotous Way,' which was indeed their custom. They conducted so much business 'over a Large Bowl of Punch' that sobriety sometimes brought 'a Man under a Suspicion of being in a Plot against the Commonwealth'—that is, the community of the ship. The very first item in Bartholomew Roberts's articles guaranteed every man 'a Vote in Affairs of Moment' and equal title to fresh provisions and strong liquor. For some who joined, drink 'had been a greater motive . . . than Gold,' and most would have agreed with the motto 'No Adventures to be made without Belly-Timber.' The pirates of the Atlantic thus struggled to assure their health and security, their own self-preservation. The image of the freebooter as a man with a patched eye, a peg leg, and a hook for a hand suggests an essential truth: sailing was a dangerous line of work. Pirates therefore put a portion of all booty into a common fund reserved for those who sustained injuries of lasting effect, whether the loss of eyesight or of any appendage. They tried to provide for the needy.*

*The pirate ship was motley—multinational, multicultural, and multiracial. Governor Nicholas Lawes of Jamaica echoed the thoughts of royal officials everywhere when he called pirates a 'banditti of all nations.' Another Caribbean official agreed: they were 'compounded of all nations.' Black Sam Bellamy's crew of 1717 was 'a mix't multitude of all Country's,' including British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Native American, and African American, along with two dozen Africans liberated from a slave ship. The main mutineers aboard the George Galley in 1724 were an Englishman, a Welshman, an Irishman, two Scots, two Swedes, and a Dane, all of whom became pirates. Benjamin Evans's crew consisted of men of English, French, Irish, Spanish, and African descent. Pirate James Barrow illustrated the reality of this internationalism as he sat after supper 'prophanely singing . . . Spanish and French Songs out of a Dutch prayer book.' The government often told pirates that 'they [had] no country,' and the pirates themselves agreed: when they hailed other vessels at sea, they emphasized their own rejection of nationality by announcing that they came 'From the Seas.' A colonial official reported to the Council of Trade and Plantations in 1697 that pirates 'acknowledged no countrymen, that they had sold their country and were sure to be hanged if taken, and that they would take no quarter, but do all the mischief they could.' But as a mutineer muttered in 1699, 'it signified nothing what part of the World a man liv'd in, so he Liv'd well.'"*

Gabriel Kuhn, in his book *Life Under The Jolly Roger*, largely agrees with this assessment. He states that:

*"Even non-radical historians concede that the 'pirate communities were ... democracies. A hundred years before the French Revolution, the pirate companies were run on lines in which liberty, equality and brotherhood were the rule rather than the exception.' The buccaneer's society has been called 'the most democratic institution in the world of the*

*seventeenth century,' and 'essentially communistic in its organisation.' Maritime metaphors like 'floating democracy' or 'floating republic' abound."*

Kuhn, however, asks questions that Linebaugh and Rediker, Marxist historians, are never going to ask. Specifically, and usefully for my purposes, Kuhn asks after the relation of piracy to anarchy. A first notable point here is the evidence given by the likely French former buccaneer, Alexandre Exquemelin, who is one of our major sources of information for seventeenth century piracy. In writing out the articles of the Tortuga buccaneers, for example, he writes that anyone found unfaithful to their articles after taking the pirate oath of allegiance "is separated and turned out of the society". In anarchist ears like mine this sounds like the practice of freedom of association or, in this case, the denial of that freedom to those adjudged to have betrayed it and so closed the door to it in the case of a specific pirate community. In this case, Kuhn argues that on the basis of such articles pirates made rules FOR THEMSELVES which others, outsiders, were not expected to adhere to - because they weren't for them. This was SELF-ORGANISATION but it was also oppositional organisation for the values the pirates used were precisely in opposition to those that they might have expected (and many experienced) aboard a merchant or military ship in the service of a state.

Consider, for example, the articles of a pirate Captain Lowther which Gabriel Kuhn reproduces:

- i. The Captain is to have two full shares; the master is to have one share and a half; the doctor, mate, gunner and boatswain, one share and a quarter.

ii. He that shall be found guilty of taking up any unlawful weapon on board the privateer or any prize by us taken, so as to strike or abuse one another in any regard, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and majority of the Company shall think fit.

iii. He that shall be found guilty of cowardice in the time of engagement shall suffer what punishment the Captain and the Majority shall think fit.

iv. If any gold, jewels, silver etc., be found on board of any prize or prizes, to the value of a piece-of-eight, and the finder do not deliver it to the quartermaster in the space of 24 hours, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and the Majority shall think fit.

v. He that is found guilty of gaming, or defrauding another to the value of a shilling, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and majority of the Company shall think fit.

vi. He that shall have the misfortune to lose a limb, in time of engagement, shall have the sum of £150 sterling, and remain with the company as long as he shall think fit.

vii. Good quarter to be given when called for.

viii. He that sees a sail first, shall have the best pistol or small arm on board her.

These, as scholars judge, seem fairly common pirate articles that are reproduced in the articles of others and what they demonstrate is a pirate body that takes important decisions together, shares the booty between themselves relatively equally and has a care to the protection of the group as a whole. Contrast this, for effect, with the forced hierarchy of a merchant or military state naval vessel. The articles evince the mentality of

a self-selecting and self-organising group not at all inimical to anarchist ideas of affinity and free association - with a common punishment (as other articles detail more fully) being separation from the community in the action of marooning someone. These were then "marginal men freed from [enforced] social conventions, living beyond restraint except for the few rules they set for themselves." Such "rules" included a pirates' council, where all important decisions - including who was captain and quartermaster, and what their articles of association were - were made. Pirates were men acting on their own recognisance and to rules of conduct which they were free to either accept or reject for themselves.

We may note that this is already a step up from the State (or the commerce which merchants carry out under its auspices and protection) which presumes to demand and coerce your allegiance as a matter of its right or, if not its right, then its force instead. What's more, although there were several different pirate ships and crews, many scholars report that they did not fight or prey upon each other. There was a kind of "brotherhood of the sea" where pirate respected pirate and game respected game. Each might have their own ship and crew but they allowed others to have theirs too without harassment. (We should imagine some occasional swapping of personnel between the various crews as well. After all, these crews were only ever voluntary to begin with.) Nevertheless, we can to a large degree talk about "pirate solidarity" to meaningful effect. This meant that even when sustained conflict among shipmates forced a falling out and separation of the ways (as it always could) the pirate culture of common values and a group ethic of affinity and free association allowed piracy to continue even with newly reconfigured alliances. Freedom to disagree and then to separate was a cherished freedom of the pirates no less than any other but was not one states or the merchants would grant you with their death for deserters. What Gabriel Kuhn emphasises in his account of the pirates is their freely

associational collectivism and their anti-authoritarian brotherhood. They are a self-sufficient community of sea rovers who each treasure, and so consequently grant, their own agency - things which seem to have frightened their statist opponents in government. In this sense, as some suggest, we can see their rebellion of autarkic, sea-born, communal, mutual aid as one of values and not merely practices, like watery versions of the Levellers, Diggers or Ranters of land-based revolutionary ideas.

The most noted, indeed, iconic symbol of pirates and piracy, early in the eighteenth century, became the "Jolly Roger" in which often either crossed bones or crossed swords are placed beneath a skull against a black background. (Originally not all flags used exactly the same symbols but it was some combination of similar items against a black background.) Gabriel Kuhn, after Marcus Rediker in his own book *Villains of All Nations*, sees this as a unifying symbol akin to a "gang sign" which was invented to terrify piratical opponents into submission. (Pirates, rather than being blood thirsty killers committed to annihilating every ship, and every sailor, they came upon, actually seem to have used violence as more of a last resort. They much preferred deception, trickery, or terror as means to getting their prey to simply give up their ships and their cargo. After all, in a fight it was certain that several of *your* pirate crew would suffer and die too - maybe even you personally. Thus, it was better all round if prey were simply convinced to give in before an inevitable battle could occur.) It is not known exactly where "Jolly Roger" came from but one theory Kuhn espouses which tickles me in all the right places is that it is a knowing and humorous derivation of the epithet "Old Roger" which was a common moniker for the devil in these times. Pirates were then announcing themselves as a joyous company of autonomous sea devils who would do you in if you didn't give up. That they had their own flag - and not a nation's flag - can be seen as deliberate action by the pirates to describe themselves as men without nation and beyond nation, men who chose



THEIR OWN allegiances, men of anti-politics. As Marcus Rediker then states in *Villains of All Nations*:

*"When pirates created a flag of their own, as they did for the first time in the early eighteenth century, they made a new declaration: they would use colors to symbolize the solidarity of a gang of ... outlaws, thousands strong and self-organized in daring ways, in violent opposition to the all-powerful nation-states of the day. By flying the skull and the crossbones, they announced themselves as 'the Villains of all Nations.'"*

Flying such a flag, then, was an act of defiance against the very organisation of the world into nations and states by means of institutional politics to which all people were imagined to belong. It was an outright rejection of this very idea and the presumption to create one's own community, one's own allegiance, to organise yourselves, under one's own flag. It was a claim to be able to make one's own fraternity from one's own freely chosen and arbitrated associations. In this respect it is then interesting that Gabriel Kuhn wants to associate Louise Michel's similar waving and choosing of a black flag in a protest in France in the early 1880s in preference to the more regular socialist red one with the pirate's Jolly Roger. Kuhn thinks this "hard to believe" as something "purely coincidental" and its subsequent adoption as the anarchist flag of choice is then hardly without its own significance. It injects some of that piratical autarkic brotherhood into anarchist affairs at the very least and perhaps suggests yet another self-identifying group of people who refuse the impressed service of the state or commerce and who act arbitrarily in their own interests to create affinities and alliances that states and governments should not control - or even have any part in. In fact, like pirates, shouldn't both of these communities of the black flag then be seen as those who prey upon the state and commerce as private gain, as an act of pillaging and as an act of defiance, an act signifying

the invalidity of such organisations of human relations adjudged according to black flag, "anti-political" values which they of themselves invent and maintain?

But such a question then brings me to a more crucial question for my purposes and one which Kuhn also recognises too: Is this anarchy? The "this" under discussion here is, of course, piracy and this question is a common one in pirate literature - regardless of the author's political persuasion. Of course, for some of these writers, "anarchy" will be imagined as something wholly bad and destructive, perhaps something that, politically, they imagine with horror. Yet the equation, or question of their equation, is often made and so is not a question we should be shy of asking, especially not in the context I have created here. So, is "an-argh-chy" a real thing? Can we bring these things together in a profitable and compatible way? As Gabriel Kuhn phrases it: "were the golden age pirates really anarchists?" One obvious (and quite narrow) answer to this question is that they were quite obviously not. In the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries "anarchism", as a conscious political orientation, had not yet either been theorized or invented. (William Godwin, however, was starting to write of things that others would come to regard as seeds of anarchy by the end of the eighteenth century.) But that, as I've already said, is a rather narrow view of anarchy and its one I've not at all been afraid of ignoring before, taking a wider view on anarchy than others as I do. So, looking at things more broadly, this is how Kuhn answers his own question:

*"There appear to be two main ways to respond: 1. If being anarchistic means to live outside the control of the nation-state, or any form of institutionalized authority, then the golden age pirates were surely anarchistic—as much as the nomadic and 'primitive' people they have been compared to. 2. If being anarchistic means to consciously attempt to realize social ideals of universal equality and justice, then the golden age pirates were hardly*

*anarchistic. Too many indications exist that they had no social ideals at all, or at least none that extended beyond a community of 'brothers' who pledged loyalty to one another. If there was an anarchism of golden age pirates, it hence lay in their rejection of institutionalized authority and in attempts at egalitarian community building."*

Here, of course, Kuhn raises an interesting and necessary question of his own (which he himself doesn't ask): what is anarchy? He seems here to take it to be "consciously attempting to realise social ideals of universal equality and justice" but that is, to say the least, a highly questionable definition. If, for example, you read the writings of Albert Libertad, E. Armand or Renzo Novatore (or numerous other French and Italian writers between 1880 and 1920, not to mention American-based anarchists in the same time frame such as Benjamin Tucker, Voltairine de Cleyre or even Emma Goldman) is that the definition of anarchy you would emerge with? I doubt it. This question of what we take "anarchy" to be, however, is obviously a key one if we are going to ask about the confluence and compatibility of pirates and piracy with it. Kuhn argues, on the grounds pirates didn't fight for UNIVERSAL social liberty, that then pirates weren't anarchists. But neither E. Armand nor Renzo Novatore (the latter very much a landlubbing pirate of his own kind himself as I will discuss below) fought for UNIVERSAL social liberty either - and no one seems to have any problem describing them (or any of the others I named) as "anarchists". I myself have made reference to their lives and writings multiple times throughout my time consciously thinking about anarchy and anarchists - and their lack of social concern or requirement for universal equality and justice as a societal metanarrative has not been any deterrent in that respect - as it seems not to be for others either. We may then question if Kuhn's second definition is legitimate and can stand.

In fact, I think his first definition is actually much nearer the mark and cancels out the second, unnecessary, definition which Christianises anarchy in a way at least Nietzsche, and subsequent Nietzschean anarchists (this is not an irrelevance as Kuhn himself in the very book I am interacting with here wants to give a Nietzschean reading of pirates later on), would whole-heartedly have disapproved of. What characterises anarchy is its rejection of "institutionalized authority" and its attempts at creating self-arbitrating, self-organising relations (called, by some, community). This, as I put it most forthrightly, is a simple matter of the anti-politics of SELF-ORGANISATION. This is the anarchistic principle (one to remember throughout this book, in fact). And its one, as we have seen, that the pirates embraced entirely as the foundation of their very existence in actions, once carried out, which would destroy any possibility of their fulfilling Kuhn's second definition as actual historical pirate activity actively worked against it. So, no, there was no "anarchist fight for the benefit of *all*" in piracy. *But I do not take "for the benefit of all" to be anarchy.* I take that to be its turning it into a religion, crusade or dogma, the creation of a spook before which people should bow in order to be inhabited by it. That, in the end, is NOT anarchy; it is anti-anarchy. The pirates were right not to engage in such a fight for their fight was the more anarchist one, the fight for self-made and self-run community, a freedom of relations and associations that respected personal agency and attempted to deal fairly with those who chose to be a part of it in a kind of pirate mutual aid as (a result of) their direct action. That is anarchy as I understand it. That is pirate an-argh-chy rather than the evangelicalisation and universalisation of the spooks "equality" and "freedom" and "justice". These spooks, in fact, once you are inhabited by them, more often than not only create cops in whatever spaces they are active. They are copthink not anarchy.

Taking Kuhn's fourth chapter, which I have been following here, out of order we can linger on the question of the compatibility (or otherwise) of piracy and anarchy a bit longer. In

his sixth section of this chapter Kuhn wants to ask after the "revolutionary, radical and proletarian" credentials of pirates. But, actually, we get a similar assessment as before from Kuhn for, yet again, the distinction made is between having "a conscious all-encompassing political agenda—i.e. an agenda to fundamentally change all of society's organizational structures" and "contributing to a disruption of society's organizational structures that pose[s] a fundamental threat to the political order". In other words, Kuhn wants, all over again, to contrast actions which simply deny someone's imagined political reality and values, and theories put ahead of oneself which one wants to impress upon the world for oneself. (This I term as politics vs anti-politics.) Yet we already know from our discussion here to date that pirates were content to make their own communities and relations based upon pleasing themselves and were not potential or actual benevolent dictators set on "changing the world" and enforcing that state of affairs on others as dictators or tyrants. In fact, any "changing the world" they did was as a consequence of their desire to rule themselves and construct their own networks of relations; it was derivative. Their "revolutionary identity" was thus consequential upon their choices for themselves rather than as a deliberate program conceived to coerce and control others (i.e. it was anti-political). It was revolutionary and radical, then, in its effects but not as a deliberate making of the world whole and entire. They were marginal defiers of convention and law much more than they were those impressing their own versions of these things on society as a whole. (They were, then, kinds of sea guerrillas.)

You will not be surprised to find that I, once again, imagine this to be a very anarchistic thing to do for anarchists themselves, I propose, are not those who want to impress the world to their standards. Even the Italian anarchist communist, Errico Malatesta, as I never tire of saying, believed that anarchy was in the people *emancipating themselves* and NOT in having it forced upon them. Anarchy, like sea-borne piracy, is SELF-ORGANISATION, self-

realisation, it is not creating a way the world should be and forcing it into that mould. In fact, that is the opposite of it. So the pirates' marginal defiance of state power and governmental coercion to certain economic relations is something I regard as authentically anarchist and insurrectionary, anti-political activity. Moreover, it's an anarchy of practice which pirates make a matter of their life and death, something to which they commit whole-heartedly - and this speaks only to its, and their, credit as a consequence.

Consequently, I find Kuhn's searching for "a self-conscious political aspect" to pirate actions - as if this were necessary in order to validate it as authentically positive political action - a total red herring. The self-conscious political aspect of the pirates' activity WAS THEIR ACTUAL (ANTI-POLITICAL) ACTIVITY. What was political about pirates was their PIRACY and how they went about actualising it as a way of life in the world. It doesn't matter if their targets were "indiscriminate" nor if "they were probably more concerned about their personal freedom... than in saving mankind". "Saving mankind" is for saviours and religions in any case and neither piracy nor anarchy is, nor should be, that. Pirates, as Kuhn finally acknowledges, although without regarding piracy as a legitimate form of "anarchy in itself", were the rejectors of "class society altogether". They were not people who worked for a "working class revolutionary agenda". But I see no problem with that and neither do I see any incompatibility with an anarchy I have distilled down to the principle: "SELF-ORGANISATION". This is the revolutionary pirate radicality. It is this anti-politics of self-created values and practice or it is nothing.

When Kuhn comes to evaluate the "political legacy" of the Golden Age pirates he has concentrated on in his last chapter, however, this doesn't seem to be good enough for him. He writes in this conclusion how his book has repeatedly questioned "unconditionally embracing the golden age pirates as role models for radical politics". (Indeed, he

concludes that it is an "impossibility" to do so.) He describes the two central problems he has with this idea as the pirates' lack of a "wider ethical and political perspective" (basically, and in my terms but not Kuhn's, he wishes pirates had been benevolent dictators, more politicians, who wanted to impress their imagined "just" values upon the world) and, secondly, the pirates' lack of "a level of coordination that could have allowed for establishing a sustainable counterculture and an effective communal defence against their enemies". (Here he seems to wish pirates had become their own state, society and institutional police force.) In both of these points I think Kuhn's basic problem is that he completely misunderstands pirates and piracy (not to mention anarchy) because he wishes to impose his own, incompatible views upon them instead which act as his judge and jury in the matter. He wants politicians but gets anti-politicians.

In the first case, for example, "individual" radicality, or radicality for us who choose it but not for everybody else who doesn't, seems not really radical enough for Gabriel Kuhn. In his discussion of this point, for instance, he betrays his own metanarrative and collectivist allegiances when he says that "theories of liberation stressing the need to liberate yourself (and the rest will follow) build on a strict dichotomy between the individual and society that, in the end, only serves capitalism and the State, as it undermines the collective effort necessary to bring about the fundamental social change needed to free us all." Yet not only is this argument partisan in framing its goal - as the writing of egoists from Stirner to Goldman to Armand - who would argue that your own emancipation is not contingent or consequent on anyone else following - would demonstrate - but what Kuhn neglects to mention here is that no one is forced to want the dogma of a benevolent world order "freeing us all" as an imposition upon the world in the first place. Much less are they committed, as they necessarily would be, to what seems such a bloody, unforeseeable (in its outcomes and consequences) and unnecessary fight. Kuhn here

simply sets *his* political aim as the standard and imposes it on everyone. That is a most unanarchistic - and non-piratical - thing to do. Kuhn, in my terms in this book, wants more politics. But pirates and anarchists, so I suggest, do not.

In fact, I think this is simply a misunderstanding - for pirates were not in that position anyway. They were men (almost exclusively!) who found themselves far from home as a result of state violence and impressment who simply wanted a life of freedom instead of the servitude they had previously been forced into (by politics). They grasped an opportunity for freedom and welcomed anyone else who did the same. They made the most of their circumstances. They did not immediately rush headlong to the nearest capital intent on some righteous crusade for universal equality, freedom and justice and, moreover, would have been stupid and doomed to do so. Instead, and in a way comparable to the Diggers, they seem to have taken the view that freedom, and exercising it, is a matter for all of us, an opportunity each can take if they will grasp it in whatever ways please them to do so. And the more the merrier - but certainly not as a dogma or crusade or some easily defeated political organisation. True liberty, in fact, only comes when one does liberate *oneself* and until one liberates *oneself* (not least from politics) one is never truly free - whatever one's external circumstances. Pirates did liberate themselves, internally and externally, and they welcomed all who did the same as opportunity presented itself. This may not accord with evangelical collectivist dogmas or modern Leftist organisational politics - but then it has no duty to do so anyway.

Such dogmas as these as Kuhn betrays here leak into his second point too for Kuhn seems to judge that, somehow, and in some way not quite explained, what the pirates achieved was a disappointment or somehow not good enough. (Surely this is for them to decide though?) There is a persistent "if only" in Kuhn's analysis which never seems to go away.



This bothers me because it tends to the suggestion that there is some ideal or better destination to which the pirates, or pirates in general, *should* be heading, some utopian ideal or destination which is the actual and real goal of social anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism which the pirates (and, who knows, perhaps most anarchists in Kuhn's mind) fall short of. If this is the case, I reject the idea completely and out of hand. And, in fact, the pirates function as my example of why this is and why it should be as an example of anarchy. Put simply, if anarchy is self-organisation, as I contend, it is then people who get to decide *their own* destinations and the point, purpose and function of *their own* lives and activity. There is NO idealistic utopia to which all "true" radicals or revolutionaries "should" be tending: there is only the one we pick for ourselves for the reason or reasons we find important in so doing. So, yes, Kuhn may be entirely correct to point out that the pirates' way of life could only exist in certain circumstances and was not foresighted enough or well enough arranged to withstand the maritime state persecution which, soon enough, came its way but, taking this point of view on board, SO WHAT? Pirates were living a self-determined, self-organised kind of life. One presumes they were eventually sent to the gallows or the bottom of the sea with the defiant look on their faces of those who had lived and died on their own terms ("A MERRY LIFE AND A SHORT ONE!"). If anarchy (or, indeed, piracy) means anything, then surely it means the ability and the determination to do that (rather than the strictly conventional ambitions of "politics")?

Pirates, as Kuhn himself recognises in a section of his fourth chapter, were essentially sea-born guerrillas who lived by expropriation. They were men of "individual conscience" and had to be for this is the only way piracy (and anarchy, in my opinion) can work. You can't force someone to be a pirate (note how there were punishments prescribed for cowardice or for not whole-heartedly joining in with the drinking culture - pirates wanted

to be with men committed to their culture and its protection from the heart) and you can't force someone to be an anarchist (or a guerrilla for that matter) either. These must be things freely given and committed to by people themselves and nothing less will suffice. Such relationships only work if they are mutual and on an equally committed footing. These were the values pirates espoused in the setting up of their ship communities. It seems hard to imagine, however, how this could become the thing Kuhn seems to wish it had become for, as Kuhn himself quotes in his section on pirates as guerrillas, guerrillas are "not an army but small armed groups, intentionally fragmented". Guerrillas exist to attack a far superior force but to engage it on their own terms. They are not formed to be an entire society or, as Kuhn intimates, to exist on a "grand scale". Kuhn has, in fact, already noted in his book that pirates lacked a "revolutionary consciousness" - and presumably he regards this as to their detriment. I, however, do not, for their "revolution" (which was anti-political rather than customarily political) was living life on their own terms rather than in the terms of theoreticians who write books or impose end goals upon society at large under the rubric of modern liberal politics. The pirates' "revolution" was their defiance and their determination to form relationships for their own benefit and run in ways they chose. This, I maintain, is also the anarchist's revolution, their insurrection against an authoritarian world society, too.

Peter Lamborn Wilson (AKA Hakim Bey), in his book *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegades*, raises this point when he argues that "Pirates were very nearly communistic in their pure state." However, pirates, as Lamborn Wilson further remarks:

*"don't fit the Marxist definition of 'social bandit' (i.e., 'primitive revolutionary') because pirates have no 'social' context, no society of peasants for whom they serve as focal elements of resistance. Marxists like [historian Eric] Hobsbawm never include the pirates*

*among their approved 'precursors' of true radicalism because they see the pirates - at best - as individuals involved in resistance simply as a form of self-aggrandizement and primitive accumulation. They forget that groups of pirates formed their own social spheres, and that the 'governments' of these groups (as expressed in ships' 'articles') were both anarchistic in affording maximum individual freedoms, and communistic in eliminating economic hierarchy. The social organization of the pirates has no parallel in any of the states of the 15-18th centuries - except Rabat-Salé. The Republic of Bou Regreg was not a pure pirate utopia, but it was a state founded on piratical principles; in fact, it was the only state ever founded on these principles."*

Peter Lamborn Wilson's book is about a tale to the side of the others I have referenced here (which were about largely 'European' pirates operating across the Atlantic in general) because it focuses on North African (and necessarily Muslim-influenced) pirates of that region, specifically those of Rabat-Salé (colloquially known as the Sally Rovers) in what is now Morocco. But his point here is well made that many, even scholars with some socially-focused political commitment, often see in pirates nothing but selfish accumulators of personal wealth within a regularised system of politics. They are proto-capitalists rather than proto-anarchists - and this largely because of what they lack - something Gabriel Kuhn himself examples in his own way - which is a necessarily universalising and metanarrative benevolent social concern to change the course of history and institutionalise it in ways thought "better", a moralising judgment fully entangled with modern liberal conceptions of politics and its imagined necessary goals.

This analysis, in my view, is simply to ignore what makes pirates into pirates which is what they do and how they go about it - a life of expropriation living on their own recognisance. That is their anti-political model and revolutionary message, one as

revolutionary to a Marxist historian as to a governmental official or the chairman of a Board of Trade. Their revolution is "*we shall live how we want, for our own benefit and according to our own purposes: we shall organise ourselves*". It should be considered by all that this is actually the only real revolution there really ever is. (Don't believe me? Try doing it!) Live for today, live for yourself, live with such as will be brothers and sisters and make common cause. Deny all political institutions. And never try to impose a way of being upon the whole world. In fact, always resist EXACTLY THAT. Be pirates, be guerrillas, be "heretics" (in the words of Peter Lamborn Wilson). Be participants in a free world where everyone who is free may go wherever they will. That is the anarchy of piracy, an anarchy of agency, of autonomy, of free association, brotherhood and mutual aid, an intentional community of the sea outside the law and beyond the state, an anti-politics in place of politics. This would be what I call instantiating the meanings and values of anarchy and of "guerrilla mind".

## The Politics of Piracy: Renzo Novatore and Max Stirner

In his book *Life Under the Jolly Roger*, Gabriel Kuhn, whose views in that book I discussed at some length previously, ends his penultimate chapter with a section that looks at Golden Age piracy (late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Atlantic piracy) through Nietzschean eyes. Kuhn imagines piracy “difficult to define” politically, and open to a wide range of interpretations, yet he also imagines that at its “core” what we find is “an unrestrained existential vitality” which, as accomplished readers of Nietzsche will know, lends itself very readily to Nietzschean interpretation. Kuhn labels this “Dionysian” in reference to Nietzsche’s repeat references to both Dionysos and “the Dionysian” in Greek thought and culture which he often typifies as a mood, attitude or form of being/becoming one should be inhabited by. Nietzsche in fact even refers to himself as Dionysos - and not least when waging war against Christianity. How might we best typify this “Dionysian” in a useful way and without turning this chapter into a distracting essay about Nietzschean philosophy? Kuhn calls it “an incredibly strong and powerful anti-authoritarian liberatory force that knows no restriction by social considerations, ethical principles, or political ideals.” He imagines (probably not without some trepidation) that such a force could be turned to anything. I actually think that is the point for I imagine the Dionysian as a life force that is all about exalting and having exuberance in one’s vitality. It is life as a dance or as play, a life that dares and adventures, a life that instinctively struggles for, and exists within the context of, its own freedom, never imagining for a moment that any other option is, would be, or could be possible. The Dionysian is therefore both constantly overcoming oneself but also a constantly overcoming the world. It sets nothing in stone except its continuing and self-perpetuating, self-defining, self-actualising existence.

In the section of his book referred to, Kuhn wants to analyse pirates in the context of what he regards as Nietzschean/Dionysian values in this respect. He does this positively and so is, in some way, trying to show that pirates are, in some measure, Dionysian themselves. Kuhn's interpreted Dionysian values are affirmation, liberty, defiance, self-determination, merit, festival, chance, flux, fear, death, destruction and intoxication. Readers with some experience of Nietzsche's writing will immediately be able to make more sense of such a list than those unfamiliar with his thought. However, in order to help out those unfamiliar and, incidentally, to carry forward my own essay on the politics of pirates, I will read through what Kuhn has to say, bringing up such points as seem good to me.

Kuhn starts with "affirmation" and what is being affirmed here is life itself regardless of its circumstances. This is a life that does not have to be justified by reasons or achievements for the life itself is beyond judgment and imagined "essentially just". Nietzsche was one who wanted to be positive about life simply because it was, because it existed, because it was there to be lived. Life was thus something to be seized, grasped, taken hold of, self-actualised. Kuhn essentially sees this in pirates too. They are those who take hold of their lives and determine to glory in them, on their own terms, and affirm in their own way for as long as they last. As such, they affirm a kind of reality they purpose(ful)ly will for themselves.

In my section on pirates at the beginning of *Black Flag* I make brief mention of the fact that many pirates were renegade seamen who, in all likelihood, had been forced into going to sea in the first place. They were deserters fleeing navies and governments that had essentially forced them to become slaves rather than willing volunteers or those who had signed up for advertised jobs. Consequently, they bore a natural resentment towards

authority that had festered in the often bitter conditions on board a ship at sea and they saw piracy as their freedom from a past life under such conditions and the embracing of a new life where they were, at least, their own masters. In that same book, *Black Flag*, I heartily embrace the notion of anarchists as “free spirits”, which is a Nietzschean term, and this leads to the concept of “liberty” as a core reason for why people ever became pirates at all. Put simply, pirates wanted to be free, and their conditions being that dire and their lives essentially forfeit for a government power that cared about them only as labour that could be used up for their own benefit, they felt they had nothing to lose in risking it all for a taste of life beyond authority. One day’s real freedom tastes better than ten years of slavery, one might imagine. In other words, pirates really and actually grasped at genuine political and economic liberty, no matter how short-sighted or eventually unworkable their lifestyle would prove to be. In many respects, in fact, the longitude of their experiment in free living is utterly irrelevant. They lived free however long they lived. Who could ask for more than this? “Give us freedom or give us death” might consequently be imagined a legitimate, and understandable, pirate mentality.

Gabriel Kuhn links a pirate love of Dionysian liberty with an attitude of defiance. This combines in his interpretation with Nietzschean rejection of values and their purposeful transvaluation, a creation of entirely new and overcoming culture. Pirates essentially did this for they had to create entirely new ways of life and make them work of themselves. Pirates were necessarily anti-authoritarian but this was not just a hatred of certain masters but a hatred of the concepts of masters and being mastered by others at all. Pirate captains, in some historical recitations, were consequently not the bosses of their crews but merely the functionary charged with leading in battle, more a nominated organiser than a boss. Pirate captain was thus a functional role and not an ontological status and pirates thus defied not only governments but conventions and even moralities

as well. What should be standing out like a sore thumb to readers at this point is that IT LARGELY WORKED and pirate societies were functioning societies.

We may imagine that for such to be the case we must be talking about strong-willed people. In any difficult circumstance there will be those who crumble and those who act. Pirates were those who acted. Kuhn notes that Nietzsche did not imagine that such strong wills were for everyone. Indeed, he quotes him to the effect that they are only for the few. Asserting one's independence, which is what pirates did, has consequences and costs and not everybody is prepared for them or able to meet their challenge. Pirates were consequently self-determined people who could motivate themselves, who could address danger by leaping into adventure, who would address a threat by taking a risk. They cultivated a confidence in themselves which some have seen as not unlike an egoistic anarchism. In short, a pirate takes their life in their own hands. And is to be praised and honoured for having the bravery and self-determination to do so in defiance of authority. They imagine themselves free and live exactly as if they are.

As a consequence, and as the next Dionysian value Kuhn highlights in his interpretation, pirates built and lived in a society based on merit. If one, by how one lived and associated, recommended oneself through one's behaviour, one would become a valued friend and colleague, one of an association of similar types of people, a community of free spirits. Perhaps one might even rise to captain. In such community how one behaved, that one pulled one's weight, played one's part, got stuck into the community life and had courage in the face of battle, were essential elements for any pirate to have. Suspicion was often raised where men either, for example, didn't take part in the drinking culture of the group or were cowards. Pirates were genuine communities where distinction came from playing



along according to their values of courage and brotherhood. There was no “every man for himself” here and your behaviour was all you ever had to recommend you.

Dionysos was the god of wine and, historically, was eulogised through various “Dionysia” which were communal Greek festivals. Pirates were inveterate boozers who, when on land, would have had little to do but drink. Some, as a consequence, have described pirate life as essentially one long party, a set of lives dedicated to constant “*joie de vivre*”. Life was a party for the pirates, the polar opposite of the oppressed misery many of them would have experienced as impressed crew on some government or merchant ship. We might see this as somewhat deliberate and purposeful too, however, a challenge to the notion that life is serious and about noble misery. The pirates laugh at that idea and, in their practice, directly refute it. Life is to be celebrated and enjoyed – for as long as we have it – and to hell with your seriousness and noble misery! Some pirate writers have consequently noted that there were musicians amongst the pirate crews – and these were not the least important members of the crew. The party atmosphere had to be maintained and this was something pirates set out to achieve and encourage on purpose as part of their mentality and way of life. It was thus an aspect of their self-organising anti-politics.

Kuhn’s next two values are “chance” and “flux” which are related concepts. Obviously, to even become a pirate was to commit oneself to a life of the unknown in which things could change completely within hours. Every time a pirate ship engaged another ship it was a possibility that you would not be leaving the engagement alive or with all your limbs or organs intact. Being a pirate, then, was to put oneself consciously at risk and to live life as a risk. Kuhn imagines this corresponds:

*"to Nietzsche's conviction that the 'true philosopher ... lives 'unphilosophically' and 'unwisely,' especially unreasonably, and feels the call and duty to engage in hundreds of experiments and temptations of life—he risks himself all the time, he plays the evil game.' He belongs to those who 'love danger, war, and adventure.'"*

A pirate life was a life of moments of extremely consequential intensity in which nothing could happen for days or weeks but then, in half an hour, you or your friends could be dead or you were sailing away with captured goods as others lay dead. It was a life that embraced danger but in which outcomes were never certain and a game of dice was played with life itself. No wonder pirates loved gambling (although this was sometimes outlawed onboard ship by certain pirate articles in order to stop arguments developing). They gambled with their lives all the time and, indeed, they wagered their lives on the kind of life they chose to live.

Another aspect to this instability of chance, however, was the flux of pirate living. Pirate crews were associational in composition. You were in a pirate crew because you wanted to be. No one was forcing you to be and you could often leave in good conscience if you wanted to or because, for example, you didn't agree with how this one went about its business and wanted to go join another or even form your own. Allegiance, in this respect, was voluntary and could be revoked by the individual pirate themselves (subject to having "done one's bit" for the crew). "Freedom to separate" was not the least of the values the pirate consequently cherished and this meant that the crews themselves would constantly change. Life in its relationships for the pirate was then a constant flux with people separating voluntarily or dying – involuntarily! – all the time.

This, of course, leads to “fear” and “death” and Nietzsche, we may note, never denies that a life of chance or flux is not something to be afraid of. He just imagines that fear is not a good enough reason not to pursue that life anyway. What causes one fear, what leads to one’s most intense suffering, can also be the path of one’s highest hopes – and one must have the courage and determination for that. Fear and suffering are then things worth experiencing if one simultaneously gets to live one’s most exciting and rewarding life and one must likely endure much if one would experience life as a superabundant thing. People who cower in corners do not, as a rule, enjoy amazing lives. Happy, then, is the one who lives with something to fear. This fear, of course, includes fear of death for the pirate – either by being killed in a conflict or by being captured and put to death. Marcus Rediker has estimated that at least a quarter of the pirates died in combat and that “premature death” was a constant companion of those taking up a life of piracy.

But this intimacy, both as your business and your possible lot, with death didn’t stop people becoming pirates. In fact, pirates rather seemed to have embraced its possibilities as a better alternative to the lives of misery offered elsewhere. To die as a free man, we can think they imagined, was no bad thing compared to lives of either slavery or boring domestication. They consequently valued the life in their years rather than the years in their lives; they put quality over quantity. In the famous pirate tome ascribed to Captain Johnson and thought by some to actually have been authored by Daniel Defoe, it is pirate captain Bartholomew Roberts who is quoted as toasting “a merry life and a short one” as a defiant and acerbic jibe at death. Some variations of the Jolly Roger, the pirate flag, in fact depicted dancing skeletons which could symbolise dancing or playing a game with death. Death was also often toasted with raised drinking glasses. Some consequently suggest that the meaning of piracy itself is a defiance of death for to become a pirate was to become someone hunted in a time when ending a life was a common outcome of

being caught. It is noted in some places that pirates even pledged to do themselves in rather than be caught. Here the slogan “Give me freedom or give me death” suggests itself again.

All this sounds rather self-affirming and joyful until one realises it involves visceral physicality and material destruction. Pirates would, if required to, harm or kill people, destroy things and forcibly acquire valuable goods. This is no problem for a Nietzschean interpretation of piracy as Kuhn shows. Nietzsche can in fact link destruction to existential progress even as he sees suffering as a necessity in some cases. (One can in fact argue Nietzsche often thinks of the progress of life itself as through suffering. Certainly, he refuses to think all pain, or even pain in itself, is a negative. That he would regard as ridiculously superficial.) Nietzsche, of course, is popularly famous for imagining that the strong overcome the weak – and that they deserve to. But he thinks this ethically and spiritually and not superficially. There is substance to the apparent immorality in the eyes of weak people too timid to grasp the meaning of their lives by the scruff of the neck. Thus, Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “The most noble caste was originally always the barbarian caste: their dominance was not primarily physical but spiritual—they were more complete human beings.” Gilles Deleuze, a twentieth century interpreter of Nietzsche amongst other things, thinks of negation, the ability to negate, as “an affirmation of life” and an expression of the power of affirming.

I will not deny that such thinking cuts to the heart of what people call “morality” but then what else was Nietzsche (or, indeed, the pirate) but one who said “to hell with your morality”? Both Nietzsche and pirates set out to create *new lives with new values*. Consequently, one of the things they both wanted to destroy was old values by which they could be judged. Nietzsche’s great cry in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for example, is for

those who write their own law tables and who can live up to their own laws. Destruction, negation, it seems to me, must then be fundamental to such activity for in creating anew one must first destroy the old. Negation and annihilation are thus acts of affirming positivity in this interpretation. Yet, even more than this, pirates did have a justice of punishment. In taking on navies and merchant ships protected by governments, they wished to punish and destroy those who were systematically cruel to their charges as a way of life. Thus, destruction was part of pirate anti-politics and not just ethics or spirituality. In sum, and concluding on Kuhn's final noted Dionysian value, we can say that pirates were those intoxicated with their new destructive yet creative and affirming values as a way of life. It took them over and consumed them. It was something to which they were totally committed and by which they were completely inhabited.

Kuhn moves from his Dionysian interpretation of pirates into his own concluding summary in his fifth and final chapter of *Life Under the Jolly Roger*. This begins with Kuhn noting the regular and often entirely inappropriate appropriation of pirate regalia and themes in popular culture by those who are anything but pirates or by those who promote anything but an authentically piratical lifestyle. Kuhn himself, throughout his book, has been at pains to suggest that we should not unequivocally embrace pirates as political role models. Indeed, he is not sure pirates can be adequately politically described or positioned in the first place. (See the previous essay for more on this and my commentary upon it.) He summarises his own view in two points, neither of which cut much ice with me:

1. Kuhn, correctly, argues that pirates did not have a "wider ethical and political perspective" than that of their own lives.

2. Kuhn, correctly, argues that pirates were not coordinated enough amongst themselves to create a way of life sustainable past the short to medium term.

Both of these points, I think, fail to critique the pirates appropriately for I think that neither point actually understands the pirates, or their mentality, as they would have (or even as Kuhn's own Dionysian interpretation has). Pirates did not have a wider political perspective than their own communities and crews. But why should they have? They were those who wanted freedom from the world and its government; they were those determined to live their own lives. At that moment they became those unconcerned with "the world" – if ever they had been concerned with it to begin with. They were, quite rightly, not interested in becoming world police or founding a world of universal charity. They just wanted to live their own lives. Wider political and ethical understandings are for those who are stupid enough to want to found world Utopias that will never exist. Pirates were certainly and most definitely NOT these people AND THAT IS IN FACT THEIR LESSON. Take care of your own business, mind your own relationships, care for yourselves. And let others do whatever they are going to do. THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT IS ANARCHIST ABOUT THE PIRATES. Autonomy, agency, free association, affinity, decentralisation: self-organisation. These are the values by which I have been describing anarchy. And these are the pirate values displayed, but dismissed, here by Gabriel Kuhn in his interpretation of pirates. In doing so, I believe he misses the lessons of both pirates *and* anarchy. We see this in that his second point is seen, in the light of the pirate mentality described in the preceding pages and elsewhere in my book *Black Flag*, to have once again missed the point. Pirates weren't about creating a sustainable way of life which became a world utopia – or even a self-sustaining world pirate network. They were simply and fundamentally about PURSUING THEIR OWN LIVES AS THEY SAW FIT. In doing so, I believe they teach us that this is actually all anarchy really is. What it is not, the

pirates then teach us simultaneously, is organising the world according to ANY particular plan or pre-determined outcome. Piracy, that is, is to some extent nihilistic.

Kuhn thinks this makes pirates impossible to embrace as “radical role models”. But I think it makes them irresistible and that embrace inevitable – and that Kuhn doesn’t even really understand what the word “radical” actually means for he is just another guy who wants to organise the world – in defiance of genuine pirates and anarchists everywhere. Pirates, as Marcus Rediker notes, imagined a different life and tried to live it. This is their anarchy and their inspiration to us. It has nothing to do with the success or sustainability of doing it. It has a lot more to do with having the courage and daring to do it in the first place – for however short a time that actually was. Are you brave enough to live free or are you not? That is the pirate lesson and it is far more “radical” than moral plans for how human beings should live in peace together free of overarching and coercive authority in imagined perpetuity. To live as a free human being: imagine that! Can you even? Have you ever? Do you have the embedded and cultivated anti-authoritarianism and defiance for that? Do you love your autonomy, liberty and agency so much that you will grant the same to all others? Will you allow people to associate with whoever they like for whatever reasons they think good? Remarkably few actually will in the end.

These are, then, not trivial things but the pirates managed them. It is the sons and daughters of civilisation (even the “anarchist” or “radical” ones) who struggle with them in their inauthentic and systematically coercive lives. For pirates, autonomy was their politics and their activity; even their very organisation (which was self-organisation) was of political consequence. It gave the finger to political organisation from above and to the commerce by means of which certain men determined to economically and politically dominate all others. Instead, they seem to have been early adopters of what Peter

Lamborn Wilson would go on to theorise as the “temporary autonomous zone” (which I think Wilson got from pirates). Thus, it is to misunderstand both pirates and anarchy completely to imagine that either is about permanence, arbitrary enforced structures or organising in any way other than that done by people for (and concerning) themselves. This requires no “political consciousness”, as Kuhn suggests, for this, as I know to my own cost, describes something which is often nothing more than more arrogant and self-aggrandising policemen who think themselves acting in a righteous cause. Fuck you and fuck that. Pirates simply wanted to live and organise their own lives. AND THAT IS THEIR RADICAL LESSON TO US. They and we need not be saints or have “the right political principles” or “a moral ethical outlook”. Anarchy is simply to live autonomously, to be free to come and go as you please, to self-organise. It is realising that there is no such thing as some overarching morality or “ethical soundness” by which anybody can be judged. Pirates simply wanted to live and organise their own lives. Nihilistically.

THAT IS THE GOD-DAMNED LESSON!

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If that is the case, and I posit it is, then a fantastic role model for us to consider is Renzo Novatore. Now Renzo did not go to sea as far as I’m aware. But if you want to talk about “land pirates” then he supremely fits the bill. More than this, however, in his writing he literally exudes a Nietzschean and piratical mentality which is anti-political, ethical and spiritual in equal measure. Consequently, we need to give what Novatore has to say some serious consideration and I intend to do this by quoting him extensively in English translation from Wolfi Landstreicher’s collection of his works titled *Novatore*. For it is in his own, often poetic, words that his voice comes through to us most clearly. I intend to broadly quote Novatore in the historical order of his publications (with any text in bold being my highlighting and not his) since this is the easiest means of doing so following my



source text. However, I shall make an exception with the first piece I quote (which is quoted in full) since it sets out Novatore's credentials and motives as an expropriator (which is what pirates were). It will be seen from this that "land pirate" is one good description of him:

#### The Expropriator (1919)

*"The Expropriator is the most beautiful, manly, uninhibited, virile figure that I have ever met in anarchism. He is the one who waits for nothing. He is the one who has no altar on which to sacrifice himself. He glorifies life alone with the philosophy of Action.*

*I came to know him on a distant August afternoon while the sun embroidered verdant nature in gold as, perfumed and festive, she sang a merry song of pagan beauty. He told me: I was always a restless, vagabond, rebellious spirit.*

*I studied men and their minds in books and in reality. I found them to be a mixture of the comical, the vulgar, and the cowardly. They left me nauseous. On the one hand, baleful moral phantoms, created from the lies and hypocrisy that rule. On the other hand, sacrificial animals who worship with fanaticism and cowardice. This is the world of men. This is humanity. I feel revulsion for this world, for these men, for this humanity. Plebeians and bourgeois are the same. They deserve each other. Socialism would not agree. It has discovered good and evil. And to destroy these two antagonisms, it has created two more phantoms: Equality and Fraternity among men...*

*But men will be equal before the state and free under Socialism... Socialism has given up Force, Youth, War! But when the bourgeoisie, who are spiritual beggars, don't want to see*

*themselves as equals of the rabble, who are material beggars, then even snivelling socialism allows war. Yes, even socialism allows killing and expropriating. But in the name of an ideal of human equality and fraternity... that sacred equality and fraternity that began with Cain and Abel!...*

*But with socialism one only half-thinks; one is half-free; one lives by half!... Socialism is intolerance; it is impotence of living; it is faith in fear. I go beyond!*

*Socialism has found equality good and inequality evil. Slaves good and tyrants wicked. I have crossed the threshold of good and evil in order to live my life intensely. I live today and cannot wait for tomorrow. Waiting is for the people and for humanity, therefore it cannot be my affair. The future is fear's mask. Courage and strength have no future for the simple reason that they themselves are the future that turns on the past and destroys it.*

*Life's purity goes on only with the nobility of courage that is the philosophy of action.*

*I observe: The purity of this life of yours seems to me to border on crime!*

*He responds: Crime is the highest synthesis of freedom and life. The moral world is a world of phantoms. Here there are spectres and the spectres' shadows; here there is the Ideal, universal Love, the Future. Look, the spectres' shadow: ignorance, fear, and cowardice lie there. Deep darkness, perhaps eternal. I once also lived in that gloomy, filthy prison. Then I armed myself with a sacrilegious torch, setting fire to phantoms and violating the night. When I reached the gates of good and evil, I furiously tore them down and crossed their threshold. The bourgeoisie has launched its moral anathema, the idiotic rabble its moral curse, at me.*

*But both are humanity. I am a man. Humanity is my enemy. It wants to clasp me in a thousand horrid tentacles. I try to snatch all that my yearnings need from it. We are at war. All that I have the strength to snatch away from it is mine. And I sacrifice all that is mine on the altar of my life and my freedom. This life of mine that I feel throbbing amidst the pulsing flames that blaze in my heart; amidst the wild agony of my entire being that fills my mind with divine upheavals and creates thunderous fanfares of war and polyphonic symphonies of a higher, strange, and unknown love which echo in my spirit. This life that fills my veins with vigorous and lively blood that spreads diabolical spasms of exultant expansion through all my muscles, nerves, and flesh; spasms of this life of mine that I glimpse through the crazed vision of my dreams, eager and in need of endless development. My motto is: to go along expropriating and burning, always leaving cries of moral outrage and smoking trunks of ancient things behind me.*

*When men no longer possess ethical wealth—the only treasures that are truly inviolable—then I will throw away my lock picks. When there are no longer phantoms in the world, then I will throw away my torch. But this future is far away and may never come! And I am a child of this distant future, fallen into this world by Chance, to whose power I bow.*

*So the Expropriator told me on that distant August afternoon, while the sun embroidered verdant nature in gold as, perfumed and festive, she sang a merry song of pagan beauty."*

Given that what Novatore has provided us with here is a brief anarchist expropriator's manifesto, let us now build on this thought from his productive literary final years in order that we can visualise what mentality it comes from and what questions it poses. In this respect, a good place to start is the piece "Cry of Rebellion" from 1917:

*"The restless, questioning spirit of the new human beings can no longer nurture themselves on Socrates' historical hemlock and Christ's legendary cross.*

*These two sacrifices, which have now fortunately fallen into the deep chasms of a shadowy past, were—undoubtedly—consummated completely at the expense of vigorous individualities, straining and throbbing manifestations of free life.*

*And I profess that, in contrast to Socrates and Christ, Diogenes himself seems to me to be a truly great innovator, since his wine cask has a different and much deeper meaning than Socrates' hemlock or Christ's cross.*

*But if Socrates and Christ, with their useless deaths, struck genuine individual potentialities until they bled horribly, wouldn't all revolutions following their path do the same? Didn't Christianity triumph over the nearly enviable pagan society through a revolutionary dynamic?*

*And all the liberal, constitutional, absolutist or... democratic republics, empires or monarchies, weren't they all born from torrents of blood, undulating over the scorched lands of war and revolution?*

*But why did the violent and feverish pulse of every revolution ever shatter, always freely, allowing new phantoms to arise again as sovereign rulers?*

*The answer is certainly not long in coming since no one will find it hard to understand that **all revolutions were domesticated in various ways, and revolutionaries—with the***

**exception of the smallest minority, the “madmen”—were always automatons guided by chimerical and fabulous phantoms.**

*But what value could those phantoms have for me? What use is any of this to me? To me, the Iconoclast, the killer of phantoms, the demolisher of old and new idols? What use, for example, could the triumph of Christianity be to me? To me, the ultimate anti-Christian?*

*And republics and monarchies, and all the other forms of society that rise as “sacred” sovereigns and can only recognize the “Christian”, the “subject”, the “citizen”, the “member”, etc., in me? Since I don’t consider it hard to understand that **in every form of society there must be a “system”**, indeed, this system, the best of the best: Equality!*

*But **every “sacred” system and all that is Sacred, whether divinely or humanly, demand renunciation and humiliation from me**, the Individual. But that’s not all.*

***Because every form of society, born from the fragments of the old one that fell resoundingly into the void, has the conviction that it is the only perfect one.** And it is precisely this dogma of perfection that drives it to be so utterly reactionary toward the restless Rebel who does not at all intend to bow before the new God: today, for example, if the revolt against the despot of all Russia finds approval and justification in the foul local papers, they wouldn’t approve or justify a damned thing if such a revolt were to break in... the snow-white bosom of... liberal and democratic Italy. Quite the opposite.*

*But let’s take another step forward. Let’s suppose, for example, that tomorrow a Republic is proclaimed in Italy. In such a case, wouldn’t a very large portion of those who pretend to be*

*furiously revolutionary today, themselves be the fiercest reactionary conservatives of tomorrow?*

*And if some “hothead”, some “madman”, some “enthusiast” would want to undermine their new edifice, their brand new God once again? But here I think that I might hear certain good—perhaps too good—people exclaim: But then, isn’t he an enemy of the Revolution?!—No, no. Oh, good people, listen to me again since I am so revolutionary that I barely even recognize myself! And do you know why I am a revolutionary who can barely be recognized? For a reason so simple that it is great in its simplicity. Here it is: because **I am a revolutionary guided only by the vast and uncontrollable impulse of MY expansion of will and potential.***

*There is no phantom guiding me, but rather there I am, walking. **There is no chimerical dream of a perfect society of universal human redemption,** but rather there is the absolute need for my potential affirmation before other potentialities.*

*God, the State, Society, Humanity, etc. have their own cause for themselves. If I don’t want to subjugate myself to God’s cause, I am a “sinner”. If I don’t want to submit to the State, Society, Humanity, I am a “wicked man”, a “criminal”, a “delinquent”.*

*But what is “sin”? What is “crime”?*

*Here again, I don’t think there is any need for a long and complicated digression to analyse all this, since even children must know by now that **the most serious sin that you can commit against divinity is to mock it, not obey it, desecrate it, and deny it. In short,***

***desecrating what is divinely and humanly “sacred” is the greatest “sin”, the greatest “crime”.***

*“Sacred”! This is the most monstrous and terrible phantom before which all have trembled up to now. Here is the old, harsh tablet that the new human beings must shatter! The FREE SPIRITS, the ICONOCLASTS, all those who have finally discovered in “sin” and “crime” the new spring from which the highest synthesis of life gushes. And even the rabble, when it learns to quench its thirst at this new, unknown spring, will very quickly realize that it too is a granite potentiality. But to do this, the rabble will have to stop letting itself be ruled by fear. Oh, rabble, listen to me! I am not the new Christ come to sacrifice myself on the altar of your redemption. If I did this, I would be a madman and you would be a beggar.*

*I put my lips to your profane ear and launch a cry. A frightening cry that will make you grow pale. The cry that I launch is that of the great German rebel, Max Stirner. So listen to it, since only by virtue of this magic cry will you vanish as rabble in order to rise up again in the flowering potential of all of your individualized members. Here is the magic cry: **The egoist has always affirmed himself with crime and, with sacrilegious hand, has pulled the sacred idols down from their pedestals. It is necessary to put an end to the sacred; or better still: the need to violate the sacred must become general. It is not a new revolution that approaches; but a mighty, impetuous, superb, shameless, consciousnessless crime sounds in the thunder on the horizon. Don't you see how already the foreboding sky grows dark and silent?***

*But here again, oh rabble, I see you back away and shout at me with horror: “Whatever is this crime? What does he mean by all this?” Ah, rabble, rabble! Do you still not understand his speech?*

*Well, then, listen again. He's the one who's speaking: 'Put your hand on whatever you need. Take it; it is yours. This is the declaration of the war of all against all. I alone am the judge of what I want to have.' Now do you understand, oh rabble, what is the crime that SOUNDS IN THE THUNDER ON THE HORIZON? But you, oh rabble, may not yet know how to adapt yourself to the idea of **eternal war**, you who have cradled yourself like a poor baby in the sweet dreams of eternal peace. And who even knows how many idols you still have to worship and on whose altars you still have to sacrifice yourself!*

*Poor rabble!*

*And to think that even the blind would have to notice by now that anyone who isn't able to accept eternal war as his affirmation and triumph must accept eternal slavery for the triumph of fabulous phantoms, declared enemies of the I.*

*Yes, oh rabble, I have decided, yet again, to be completely sincere with you. And this is what my sincerity tells you—**Today, you sacrifice yourself in blood-soaked trenches for a cause that is not your own. Tomorrow you may sacrifice yourself in lands made bloody by Revolution in order to later allow a new parasitic and corroding worm to rise on the seas of blood that streamed out in hot steaming spurts from your bronze veins so that a new idol could be raised up to sit over you just like the old God.***

*The consecrated chorus of Love, Pity and social Right will return, making itself heard, skilfully played on new harps, components of the most ancient symphony.*

*Rabble, listen to me! I still have something more to tell you. What I still have to tell you may well be the thing that weighs on me the most.*



*So here I am. I am UNIQUE and as long as you remain rabble, I will not be able to associate with you. When I do so, it will be in order to draw you out against my enemy who is your master. But as rabble, you will not allow yourself to be drawn out since you still adore your Lord too much.*

***You still want to go on living on your knees. But I have understood life. And anyone who understands life cannot live on his knees.***

*I have even understood all the traps that the owners of all this have set for me. When they saw me march boldly to the conquest of my life, armed with all my uninhibited potentiality, they placed before my eager eyes all of their ridiculous and insane phantoms. They tried to terrorize me with the hobgoblins of the “sacred”, but since I, the Iconoclast, the Impious one, scorn and mock all that is “sacred” and “consecrated”, and since, like Armida, I destroy the palace in which once I had to suffer enchantment, they threw off their sacred mask and launched themselves against me, imposing the most extreme against me.*

*That was the day, oh rabble, that I had the true revelation of what life is and what place my Uniqueness would have in this. Now I live on my feet. My eye no longer knows sleep. **I recognize no one’s rights against me.** Only force can defeat me now, not phantoms.*

*I said, only force can defeat me. But I also use it. I no longer ask anyone for anything. I am no beggar. I only appropriate everything that I have empowered myself to appropriate through the capacity of my potentiality. **My revolution already started a long time ago. From the moment I knew life, I took up MY weapons and declared MY war. I struggle for a cause that is my own. No other cause can interest me anymore.** My enemies also struggle for a cause that is their own and against me. But I don’t hate them for this.*

*The REAL interests that they have in fighting against me exempts them from my hatred since I have taken up my weapons against them only due to my REAL interests. I may very well kill them for my triumph, but without hating them, without despising them; I am not struggling for phantoms!*

*Rather I despise beggars, misers, all those who don't dare to fight, but who only know how to beg and weep. They are the ones who beg for fallen crumbs from the sumptuous table of my enemy.*

*And with these misers of body and spirit my enemy creates a blind and formidable power to launch against me in the battle that has started between we Egoists.*

*But what could these misers ever gain from the victory over me brought back by my enemy, i.e., by their master? Nothing more than the usual crumbs and eternal slavery! **But what are you then, oh rabble, if not the blind, unconscious, begging mass that launches yourself against me in defence of your Lord?** Listen to me, oh rabble, you must vanish as such, you must have no place in the theatre of new life.*

*Do you sneer? Are you maybe lashing out at me? Could it be that with the blows of my lash I have succeeded in awakening an inner residue of pride in you that slept hidden in the remote corners of your mind that has been servile for centuries?*

*Already in the distance you can hear the war trumpet sound, announcing the invincible attacks of the Unique ones against the phantoms: the State, Society, God, Humanity...*

*You turn pale and flee, dragging all your satellites into the abyss of the eternal void; and the rebellious phalange of Free Spirits and Iconoclasts advances into the stormy sky of the Future!"*

Here, if the first text was an anarchist expropriator's manifesto, then this chimes in the ear as a very pirate-like expression of an attitude to life and living – if the analysis in the first part of this chapter be in any way relevant to this subject. Novatore is a man against the world, a man for himself and his own way of life is an act of revolution against the world and its way of doing things. He wants to organise himself even as the pirates did and this is exactly why I see him as such a good example of the pirate mentality in a way which is also entirely anarchist. In this mentality crime is no issue (as it wasn't for the pirates) since by what rule, law or logic could it be for a man who determines his own way in the world, who accepts neither the judgments nor the justice of others? Indeed, such a person would and does go out of their way to desecrate the sacred altars of such a world (here it is not irrelevant that a youthful Novatore burned down a church) in acts of deliberate defiance. For such a one, life itself is the revolution and it is lived as one for as long as it lasts. In fact, in a further piece from 1917, "Intellectual Vagabonds", Novatore exults "madmen and delinquents" to "scorn the good and the just, since they have always been the beginning of the end." In yet another, "Wild Flowers", he delineates the true anarchist as one who "placed themselves on the margins of society" – just as pirates do and did. In all cases, such people deny to others "the right to judge them". For:

*"Only those who, with impetuous violence, know how to appraise the rusty gates enclosing the house of the great lie where the lewd thieves of the I (god, state, society, humanity) have arranged to meet, in order to take their greatest treasure back from clammy, greedy*

*hands adorned with the false gold of love, pity, and civilization, from the baleful predators, can consider themselves lord and master of himself and call themselves anarchists."*

We move to 1919. (In 1918 Novatore was busy deserting from the Italian army, being hunted and, for a short while, imprisoned.) In a piece titled "Anarchist Individualism in the Social Revolution" Novatore lays out his anarchist individualist logic (even though he claims not to have any!) and relates it to a social world. In doing so, he exalts the claims of personal autonomy and human agency, values cherished by the pirates, as well as the necessary destruction such a stance to life entails:

***"1. Anarchist individualism as we understand it—and I say we because a substantial handful of friends think this like me—is hostile to every school and every party, every churchly and dogmatic moral, as well as every more or less academic imbecility. Every form of discipline, rule, and pedantry is repulsive to the sincere nobility of our vagabond and rebellious restlessness!***

*Individualism is, for us, creative force, immortal youth, exalting beauty, redemptive and fruitful war. It is the marvellous apotheosis of the flesh and the tragic epic of the spirit. **Our logic is that of not having any.** Our ideal is the categorical negation of all other ideals for the greatest and supreme triumph of the actual, real, instinctive, reckless, and merry life! For us perfection is not a dream, an ideal, a riddle, a mystery, a sphinx, but a vigorous and powerful, luminous and throbbing reality. **All human beings are perfect in themselves. All they lack is the heroic courage of their perfection. Since the time that human beings first believed that life was a duty, a calling, a mission, it has meant shame for their power of being, and in following phantoms, they have denied themselves and***

***distanced themselves from the real.*** When Christ said to human beings: "be yourselves, perfection is in you!" he launched a superb phrase that is the supreme synthesis of life.

*It is useless that the bigots, theologians, and philosophers do their utmost with deceitful and dialectical sophisms to give a false interpretation to Christ's words. But when Christ speaks this way to human beings, he disavows his entire calling to renunciation, to a mission, and to faith, and all the rest of his doctrine collapses miserably in the mud, knocked down by he himself. And here, and here alone, is Christ's great tragedy. Let human beings open their misty eyes in the blinding sun of this truth, and they will find themselves face to face with their true and laughing redemption.*

*This is the ethical part of individualism, neither romantically mystical nor idealistically monastic, neither moral nor immoral, but amoral, wild, furious, and warlike, that keeps its luminous roots voluptuously rooted in the phosphorescent perianth of pagan nature, and its verdant foliage resting on the purple mouth of virgin life.*

2. *To every form of human Society that would try to impose renunciations and artificial sorrow on our anarchic and rebellious I, thirsting for free and exulting expansion, we will respond with a roaring and sacrilegious howl of dynamite.*

*To all those demagogues of politics and of philosophy that carry in their pockets a beautiful system made by mortgaging a corner of the future, we respond with Bakunin: Oafs and weaklings! **Every duty that they would like to impose on us we will furiously trample under our sacrilegious feet. Every shady phantom that they would place before our eyes, greedy for light, we will angrily rip up with our daringly profaning hands.** Christ was ashamed of his own doctrine and he broke it first. Friedrich Nietzsche was afraid of his*

*overhuman and made it die in the midst of his agonizing animals, asking pity of the higher man. But we are neither afraid nor ashamed of the liberated Human Being.*

*We exalt Prometheus, the sacrilegious thief who stole the eternal spark from Jove's heaven to animate the man of clay, and we glorify Hercules, the powerful, liberating hero.*

*3. Pagan nature has placed a Prometheus in the mind of every mortal human being, and a Hercules in the brain of every thinker. But morality, that disgusting enchantress of philosophers, peoples, and humanity, has glorified and sanctified the vulture exalting it as divine justice, and divine justice, which Comte humanized, has condemned the Hero.*

*The Plowman and the thinker have trembled before this baleful phantom and courage has remained defeated under the enormous weight of fear.*

*But anarchist individualism is a brilliant and fatal torch that casts light into the darkness in the realm of fear and puts to flight the phantoms of divine justice that Comte humanized.*

*Individualism is the free and unconstrained song that reconnects the individual to the eternal and universal pan-dynamism, that is neither moral nor immoral, but that is everything: Nature and Life! What is Life? Depths and peaks, instinct and reason, light and darkness, mud and beauty, joy and sorrow. Disavowal of the past, domination of the present, longing and yearning for the future.*

*Life is all this. And all this is also individualism. Who seeks to escape Life? Who dares to deny it?*

*4. The Social Revolution is the sudden awakening of Prometheus after a fall into a faint of sorrow caused by the foul vulture that rips his heart to shreds. It is an attempt at self-liberation. But the chains with which the sinister god Jove had him chained on the Caucasus by the repugnant servant Vulcan cannot be broken except by the Titanic rebel Hero, son of Jove himself.*

*We rebel children of this putrid humanity that has chained human beings in the dogmatic mud of social superstitions will never miss bringing our tremendous axe blow down on the rusty links of this hateful chain.*

*Yes, we anarchist individualists are for Social Revolution, but in our way, it's understood!*

***5. The revolt of the individual against society is not given by that of the masses against governments. Even when the masses submit to governments, living in the sacred and shameful peace of their resignation, the anarchist individual lives against society because he is in a never-ending and irreconcilable war with it, but when, at a historical turning point, he comes together with the masses in revolt, he raises his black flag with them and throws his dynamite with them.***

***The anarchist individualist is in the Social Revolution, not as a demagogue, but as an inciting element, not as an apostle, but as a living, effective, destructive force...***

***All past revolutions were, in the end, bourgeois and conservative. That which flashes on the red horizon of our magnificently tragic time will have for its aim the fierce socialist humanism. We, anarchist individualists, will enter into the revolution for an exclusive need of our own to set fire to and incite spirits. To make sure that, as Stirner***

***says, it is not a new revolution that approaches, but rather an immense, proud, reckless, shameless, conscienceless crime that rumbles with the lightning on the horizon, and beneath which the sky, swollen with foreboding, grows dark and silent.***  
*And Ibsen: 'There's only one revolution I recognize—that was truly, thoroughly radical—... I'm referring to the ancient Flood! That one alone was truly serious. But even then the devil lost his due: you know Noah took up the dictatorship. Let's make this revolution again, but more thoroughly. It requires real men as well as orators. So you bring on the roaring waters, I'll supply the powder keg to blow up the ark.'*

*Now since dictatorship will be—alas!—inevitable in the sombre global revolution that sends its bleak glow from the east over our black cowardice, the ultimate task of we anarchist individualists will be that of blowing up the final ark with bomb explosions and the final dictator with Browning shots. The new society established, we will return to its margins to live our lives dangerously as noble criminals and audacious sinners! Because the anarchist individualist still means eternal renewal, in the field of art, thought, and action.*

*Anarchist individualism still means eternal revolt against eternal sorrow, the eternal search for new springs of life, joy and beauty. And we will still be such in Anarchy."*

If all this makes no sense, some brief quotes from a 1920 piece of Novatore's, "The Anarchist Temperament in the Maelstrom of History" may lend some insight. Here he posits that "We are in anarchism – first of all – from original instinct and passionate feeling." Further on he notes that "The true freedom and right of the human being is only in his capacity to WILL! Right and freedom are Force!" A third quote of relevance from this piece is that "The Life that society offers us is not a full, free and joyful life. It is a crushed, mutilated, humiliated life. We must refuse it." These are all hardly non-piratical



sentiments. Indeed, “feeling, force and freedom” are all mightily relevant to the pirate attitude and way of life - or so it would seem according to numerous modern scholarly commentators. Yet if we romanticise such figures, as corporate and other appropriations of pirates would have us do, we erase the bite and the sting which reading Novatore restores both to them and to their mentality. Pirates, like Novatore, were not compromisers; they literally gambled their lives on living out their beliefs in acts of daring and the practice of them in an authentic way was everything to them. Novatore, in his writing, reminds us of this. Thus, he writes in “My Iconoclastic Individualism”, a piece from 1920, that:

*“I think, I know, that as long as there are men, there will be societies, since this putrid civilization with its industries and mechanical progress has already brought us to the point where it is not even possible to turn back to the enviable age of the caves and divine mates who raised and defended those born of their free and instinctive love like tawny, catlike Lionesses, inhabiting magnificent, fragrant, green and wild forests. But still I know and I think with equal certainty that every form of society—precisely because it is a society—will, for its own good, want to humiliate the individual. Even communism that—as its theorists tell us—is the most humanly perfect form of society would only be able to recognize one of its more or less active, more or less esteemed members in me. I can never be as worthy through communism as I will be as myself, fully my own, as a Unique one and, therefore, incomprehensible to the collectivity. But that within me which is most incomprehensible, most mysterious and enigmatic to the collectivity is precisely my most precious treasure, my dearest good, since it is my deepest intimacy which I alone can explain and love, since I alone understand it.”*

This piece, in fact, ends in extremely piratical terms:

*"My principle is life and my end is death. I want to live my life intensely so that I can embrace my death tragically. **You are waiting for the revolution! Very well! My own began a long time ago!** When you are ready—God, what an endless wait!—it won't nauseate me to go along the road awhile with you! But when you stop, I will continue on my mad and triumphant march toward the great and sublime conquest of Nothing!*

***Every society you build will have its fringes, and on the fringes of every society, heroic and restless vagabonds will wander, with their wild and virgin thoughts, only able to live by preparing ever new and terrible outbreaks of rebellion! I shall be among them!** And after me, as before me, there will always be those who tell human beings: 'So turn to yourselves rather than to your gods or idols: discover what is hidden within you, bring it to the light; reveal yourself!'*

*Because everyone who searches his inner being and draws out what is mysteriously hidden there, is a shadow eclipsing every form of Society that exists beneath the rays of the Sun! **All societies tremble when the scornful aristocracy of Vagabonds, Unique ones, Unapproachable ones, rulers over the ideal, and Conquerors of Nothing advance without inhibitions.** So, come on, Iconoclasts, forward! 'Already the foreboding sky grows dark and silent!'"*

Another aspect of piracy not always appreciated as it should be (as I have already hinted) is how much pirates are nihilists, negators, annihilators. This is not just of property in the things (primarily ships, of course) that they attack but also of human law and custom and, in addition, morality. Pirates lay waste to all of this for and in the creation of their own intellectual and material worlds and so a further Novatore piece from 1920, "I Am Also a

Nihilist” becomes relevant for its commentary and insight. Once more in its words I hear echoes of pirate song in the words of a twentieth century Italian anarchist:

*“1. I am an individualist because I am an anarchist; and I am an anarchist because I am a nihilist. But I also understand nihilism in my own way... I don't care whether it is Nordic or Oriental, nor whether or not it has a historical, political, practical tradition, or a theoretical, philosophical, spiritual, intellectual one. I call myself a nihilist because I know that nihilism means negation.*

*Negation of every society, of every cult, of every rule and of every religion. But I don't yearn for Nirvana, any more than I long for Schopenhauer's desperate and powerless pessimism, which is a worse thing than the violent renunciation of life itself. Mine is an enthusiastic and Dionysian pessimism, like a flame that sets my vital exuberance ablaze, that mocks at any theoretical, scientific, or moral prison.*

*And if I call myself an individualist anarchist, an iconoclast, and a nihilist, it is precisely because I believe that in these adjectives there is the highest and most complete expression of my willful and reckless individuality that, like an overflowing river, wants to expand, impetuously sweeping away dikes and hedges, until it crashes into a granite boulder, shattering and breaking up in its turn. I do not renounce life. I exalt and sing it.*

*2. Anyone who renounces life because he feels that it is nothing but pain and sorrow and doesn't find in himself the heroic courage to kill himself is—in my opinion—a grotesque poser and a helpless person; just as one is a pitifully inferior being if he believes that the sacred tree of happiness is a twisted plant on which all apes will be able to scramble in the*

*more or less near future, and that then the shadow of pain will be driven away by the phosphorescent fireworks of the true Good...*

***3. Life—for me—is neither good nor bad, neither a theory nor an idea. Life is a reality, and the reality of life is war. For one who is a born warrior, life is a fountain of joy, for others it is only a fountain of humiliation and sorrow. I no longer demand carefree joy from life. It couldn't give it to me, and I would no longer know what to do with it now that my adolescence is past...***

***Instead I demand that it give me the perverse joy of battle that gives me the sorrowful spasms of defeat and the voluptuous thrills of victory.***

***Defeated in the mud or victorious in the sun, I sing life and I love it!***

***There is no rest for my rebel spirit except in war, just as there is no greater happiness for my vagabond, negating mind than the uninhibited affirmation of my capacity to life and to rejoice. My every defeat serves me only as symphonic prelude to a new victory.***

*4. From the day that I came into the light—through a chance coincidence that I don't care to go into right now—I carried my own Good and my own Bad with me.*

*Meaning: my joy and my sorrow, still in embryo. Both advanced with me along the road of time. The more intensely I felt joy, the more deeply I understood sorrow. You can't suppress the one without suppressing the other.*

*Now I have smashed down the door and revealed the Sphinx's riddle. Joy and sorrow are only two liquors with which life merrily gets drunk. Therefore, it is not true that life is a squalid and frightening desert where flowers no longer blossom nor vermilion fruits ripen.*

*And even the mightiest of all sorrows, the one that drives a strong man toward the conscious and tragic shattering of his own individuality, is only a vigorous manifestation of art and beauty.*

*And it returns again to the universal human current with the dazzling rays of crime that breaks up and sweeps away all the crystallized reality of the circumscribed world of the many in order to rise toward the ultimate ideal flame and disperse in the endless fire of the new.*

*5. The revolt of the free one against sorrow is only the intimate, passionate desire for a more intense and greater joy. But the greatest joy can only show itself to him in the mirror of the deepest sorrow, merging with it later in a vast barbaric embrace. And from this vast and fruitful embrace the higher smile of the strong one springs, as, in the midst of conflict, he sings the most thundering hymn to life.*

*A hymn woven from contempt and scorn, from will and might. A hymn that vibrates and throbs in the light of the sun as it shines on tombs, a hymn that revives the nothing and fills it with sound.*

*6. Over the Socrates' slave spirit that stoically accepts death and Diogenes' free spirit that cynically accepts life, rises the triumphal rainbow on which the sacrilegious crusher of new*

*phantoms, the radical destroyer of every moral world, dances. It is the free one who dances on high amidst the magnificent phosphorescence of the sun.*

*And when huge clouds of gloomy darkness rise from swampy chasms to hinder his view of the light and block his path, he opens the way with shots from his Browning or stops their course with the flame of his domineering fantasy, forcing them to submit as humble slaves at his feet.*

***But only the one who knows and practices the iconoclastic fury of destruction can possess the joy born of freedom, of that unique freedom fertilized by sorrow. I rise up against the reality of the outer world for the triumph of the reality of my inner world.***

***I reject society for the triumph of the I. I reject the stability of every rule, every custom, every morality, for the affirmation of every willful instinct, all free emotionality, every passion, and every fantasy. I mock at every duty and every right so I can sing free will.***

*I scorn the future to suffer and enjoy my good and my bad in the present. I despise humanity because it is not my humanity. I hate tyrants and I detest slaves. I don't want and I don't grant solidarity, because I am convinced that it is a new chain, and because I believe with Ibsen that the one who is most alone is strongest.*

*This is my Nihilism. Life, for me, is nothing but a heroic poem of joy and perversity written with the bleeding hands of sorrow and pain or a tragic dream of art and beauty!"*

There are two more extended pieces I want to refer to, one from 1921 and one from 1922 (the year of Novatore's death in a police shoot out after he and an associate had been ambushed – a very piratical death to endure), before I am done with Renzo Novatore. The first of these is the extremely important piece "The Revolt of the Unique", a piece Novatore addresses to one Carlo Molaschi, once a former individualist anarchist like himself but now someone who has renounced his former ways for the anarchist communism of Errico Malatesta. Novatore, of course, finds fault with this but, in doing so, he writes in such a way as to explain what motivates his desire to be an anarchist, what anarchism really is as far as he is concerned and, yet again, says things of import to an understanding of the practice of anarchy as akin to the practice of piracy. Gabriel Kuhn, he who thinks modern day "radical" political action requires "ethical soundness" or some appropriate moral direction or oversight that applies to the whole world, would do well to listen to what Novatore has to say here.

This piece begins as follows:

*"I don't want to dictate moral maxims to my 'neighbour,' or teach anyone anything... I leave this task to the missionaries of all faiths, the priests of all churches, the demagogues of all parties, the apostles of all ideas. **I only want to howl my extreme rebellion against everything that oppresses me;** I only want to push far away from me everything that the religious, socialist, or libertarian priesthood wants to impose on my individuality without me having freely accepted and wanted it...*

*... I have a personal truth of my own that isn't and can't be universal 'truth.'...*

*... Let each human being therefore work—if he thinks this way—at the discovery of his own I, at the realization of his own dream, at the complete integration and full development of his own individuality. **Every human being who has discovered and won himself walks on his own path and follows his free course.***

*But let no one come to me to impose his belief, his will, his faith on me. By denying god, fatherland, authority, and law, I have achieved anarchism. By refusing to sacrifice myself on the altar of the people and of humanity, I have achieved individualism.*

*Now I am free...*

*The war that I opened against phantoms has ended with my victory. Now the cycle of a new war has opened! **The war against the brute force of society, of the people, of humanity. Against these terrible and colossal monsters that aren't ashamed to dare to act against the unique and the brutal force of their thousand monstrous arms, I 'authorize' myself to defend myself with all the weapons that it is possible for me to dare to use: with all those means that I have the power and the ability to make use of. Without scruples! Because I am one who really follows himself!"***

I can imagine this a very "pirate" mentality indeed and to this we may add the sentences "the dream of workers is not my dream. The longings of the people are not my longings, the pains of the mass are not my pains!". Novatore, in an expression of something we have heard elsewhere before, simply wants to live his own life, to howl his own rebellion, to fight against everything he himself judges oppresses him. His purpose is not to change the world but to materially affect the circumstances of his own existence by taking as active a role as he can in shaping them, creatively and destructively. He needs no one of



any motivation telling him how to do that; indeed, he sees all such people as equally malevolent in such a motivation. Autonomy and agency brook no constricting outside organisation of any kind, not even, as Novatore sarcastically jibes at Molaschi, a “libertarian communist” one. Novatore even makes it plain in this piece that he imagines the more comfy and cosy anarchist communism (whose members often denounced anarchists who committed crime or lived as illegalists) has settled down and integrated itself into the world; it has “ended up making itself official and becoming a party”. Novatore certainly finds this in very bad taste and we should be able to see why with the renegade, vagabond and buccaneering image of anarchy he has consistently delivered. He does not imagine the life of an anarchist is “paternal democratic domesticity” but that it is much more one of the “wild reprobate”.

But what does this all mean? Novatore describes himself as the very piratical “anti-society”. By this he means “not collaborating in the preservation of the present society nor lending one’s efforts to any new social construction.” Here he means overall, as a generality, in the round. He is not interested in partaking of mass social organisation and, indeed, sees himself as consciously fighting against it. Whilst society has an attraction for what it can supply by way of materialistic needs, it also repels in its desire to socially control. This, says Novatore, gives birth to his “need” to do it violence “without scruples”. This, of course, is not so different from pirates who had escaped “the world” aboard official naval or merchant ships and now sought to do violence to that very same world. Pirates are sometimes criticised for being parasitical – they exist by picking off the things that they want from wider society and if that society collapsed or went away their lifestyle would too. We can see here, in fact, that as a criminal expropriator Novatore was in much the same situation. But, as pirates did, he saw nothing wrong with it either. Novatore in this piece might even have a reason for that when he writes:

*"The word 'Freedom' taken in itself is a negation: nothing—death! Freedom is a propulsion towards power—it is the strength of conquest and the capacity for possession... Living means doing good and bad to others. No one can live without hurting anyone.... Living means: dominating and being dominated!"*

He in fact argues that "libertarian communism" or anarchist communism is a performative contradiction. If it ever seeks to preserve itself as a system of social organisation in and through its practice then it denies "the very spirit that informs and exalts it" because, of course, you cannot enforce freedom or liberty upon people through a particular impressed form of social organisation: you must simply let people have their freedom and make of it what they will – without scruples or pre-conditions. The pirates, you will recall, made their own articles of association which governed behaviour and the self-organisation of the various crews. Individual pirates were then free to decide if the terms of this or that crew were acceptable to them and would change crew as it suited them and as they had opportunity. The anarchist communist, however, especially the Gabriel Kuhn type who imagines freedom must be imposed on all equally, does not give people such a pirate freedom. Such a person wants to organise and arbitrate the whole world over people's heads. No wonder, then, that elsewhere Novatore jokes about anarchist communist prisons and asylums as the contradictions they would surely be. I have in fact myself heard and seen such anarchists discussing similar things in all seriousness such is their righteous desire for an "ethical" kind of benevolent social organisation which adjudicates the world. But its one Novatore would fight to the death to frustrate even as the pirates did something similar in their own circumstances as well.

The last of Novatore's texts I want to address is 1922's "Black Flags", an entirely appropriate choice since the black flag is that of the anarchist even as a black flag, with

appropriate symbols written upon it, was the flag of the pirate. (There is some historical suggestion these are linked but the evidence is inconclusive even if the link is unsurprising, to me at least.) Once more in this text an Italian anarchist speaks but its the sounds of pirates that we hear:

*"Black flags in the wind  
stained with blood and sun  
Black flags in the sun  
howling of glory in the wind*

*We need to return to the sources. To drink at the ancient fountains. We need to return to heroic anarchism, to individual, violent, reckless, poetic, de-centering audacity... And we need to return with every bit of our modern instinct, every bit of our new conception of life and beauty, every bit of our healthy and lucid pessimism, which is not renunciation or powerlessness, but a thriving flower of exuberant life. We are the true nihilists of reality and the spiritual builders of ideal worlds. We are destructive philosophers and creative poets.*

*We walk in the night  
with a sun in our mind  
and with two huge golden stars  
in our blazing eyes*

*We walk...*

***'You must seek your own enemy, fight your own war, and for your own ideas!'*...**

*Only great intellectual vagabonds—carriers of the black flag—can be the luminous animating fulcrum of eternal revolution that pushes the world forward...*

*Our willful soul is multiform... The fiery throbbing of the sun and the tremulous shudders of the stars pass through it! We are rebel poets and philosophers of destruction. We are anarchists. Iconoclasts! Individualists, atheists, nihilists! We are the carriers of black flags...*

*We rush beyond every system*

*We rush beyond every form*

*We fly toward the highest freedom*

*Toward extreme ANARCHY!...*

*We have killed the 'duty' of solidarity, so that **our free lust for spontaneous love and voluntary parenthood** acquires a heroic value in life...*

*We need an epic and barbaric song of new and virgin life sounding over the world.*

*We are the carriers*

*of blazing torches.*

*We are the kindlers*

*of crackling pyres...*

*We walk on...*

***And if our dream is an illusion?***

***And if our struggles are useless and vain? And if the renewal of humanity is impossible to accomplish?***

***Ah, no! We will walk on just the same.***

***For our own dignity.***

***For the love of our ideas.***

***For the freedom of our spirits.***

***For the passion of our minds.***

***For the necessity of our life.***

*Better to die as heroes in an effort of liberation and self-elevation than to vegetate as  
impotent cowards in this repugnant reality.*

*Oh black flags,  
oh black trophies,  
emblems and symbols  
of eternal revolt.*

*You who are the bloody evidence of all human audacity: You who are the destroyers of all  
prejudice:*

*You who are the only real enemies of all human shame—of all sinister lies!*

*You who sing eternal revolt, soaked in sorrow and blood!*

*I grip it in my strong fist  
and in the midst of windy storms  
I raise it in the glory of the sun.  
In the glory of sun and the wind...  
Of wind and sun and light.*

What strikes me most about all this is the conviction and commitment Novatore expresses throughout. It is a spiritual and ethical thing with political and economic consequences. On the latter front we might note that destruction and crime seem not incidental to the mentality but essential: crime and destruction ARE NECESSARY to prosecute this, I think, piratical mentality. I imagine this is because things like autonomy, agency, free association, affinity and decentralisation, values resulting in the overall value of self-organisation, are not just beliefs or values: they are practices and so must be practised. Indeed, where such things are concerned in this mentality and philosophy of direct action ONLY THEIR PRACTICE COUNTS. One, for example, does not believe oneself autonomous: ONE ACTS AUTONOMOUSLY! Consequently, following Novatore's analysis of himself as anarchist, nihilist and iconoclast, the pirate is one who acts and must be one who acts. That he takes his life in his criminal and renegade hands and does as he pleases is what makes his life as a pirate a living reality: it is something done and not something imagined or held as a belief or value alone. If the strategy of the anarchist, exemplified here by Novatore, is "direct action" according to one's own expressed will, then this perfectly describes the pirate as a political and social animal as well.

So don't be surprised when Novatore concludes that, in the end, life is about force and exerting force. Didn't Kropotkin conclude the same when he told people to take over the farms and factories? Didn't Goldman when she told people in New York to "take bread" in 1893? We live in a world of direct action, force, freely and autonomously actualised – and only those who use it have a chance to make their own lives according to their own desires just as the pirates and Renzo Novatore did.

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Gabriel Kuhn (yes, him again) reminds us in his essay "Life Under the Death's Head: Anarchism and Piracy" that:

*"Piracy is a form of life. It has its own conditions, its own rules and ways of thought. Pirates, men and women, answer to no one except for the crew of the ship in which they are sailing at the moment, and only after joining it of their own free will. Pirates have themselves, their group, their ship, perhaps a couple of retreats, and nothing else. They obey nothing and no one, have no nation to defend, no leader, no god, no government, no State."*

Kuhn links this mentality with some words from egoist Max Stirner (an influence on Novatore): "No cause, no so-called 'highest interest of humanity', no 'holy thing' is so worthy that you should serve it, or attend to it for its own sake". It is such Stirnerism, such piratical refusal to have any cause but oneself and one's associates, that is found in the first of my own "articles of Jolly Roger's anarchy", i.e., "Hold nothing sacred and, in so doing, destroy all authority." If one holds something, anything, sacred then that thing is bestowed with an authority, one you give it from within yourself. We see this, horrifically, today as millions upon millions passively accept their slavery and incarceration in open capitalist and authoritarian prisons. To have a god, to concede a leader, to submit to a government or state, to admit of the concept of private property, to accept a boss, is to imprison yourself. Pirates knew better. So maltreated and despised by authority had many of them been aboard navy or merchant vessels serving a nascent capitalism of nation states that, receiving or achieving their freedom through various circumstances, they were utterly committed to never coming under anyone else's authority ever again – and even on pain of death (which many of them subsequently suffered in short order in either conflict or capture).

Kuhn consequently quotes with favour the notion that pirates were "anarchists and nihilists" – an appropriately Novatorean designation. Pirates put themselves on the margins of a society they essentially refused and regarded as something to plunder. They

did this not only rejecting its political and economic rules but its moral and intellectual ones too. Pirates created their own logic and morality of brotherhood – and it was only for those within their fold or possibly for others in other groups like their own, those who shared their lifestyle and had made similar choices to become those on the margins. You could join this brotherhood, and the crew of captured vessels were regularly given this choice, but if you weren't in it then you were simply considered an outsider, a potential enemy. Kuhn tells us in the same essay just referred to that, in Max Stirner's terms, each pirate becomes Stirner's "ego":

*"The ego is one born free, free from the start... (He) is originally free, because he recognises no power other than his own; he requires no liberation, because from the start he rejects everything except himself, because he values nothing more highly than himself, aims for nothing higher; in short, because he acts from himself."*

Kuhn consequently imagines that piracy, in its origin, is all about "singularity and independence", about a very Stirnerite desire not to be ruled "in any way by another", to hold nothing outside oneself sacred. This is nothing bourgeois or idealistic, something philosophical, but a very physical and material desire to live free, something practical not theoretical. It is more an existential need than a value actualised (although it is actually very much both). It is living according to anarchistic principles of autonomy, agency and free association, a making the principle of self-organisation the motive factor of their lives. It is putting their lives in their own hands. This is all manifestly obvious as one reads through standard and excellent pirate histories such as David Cordingly's *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and Reality of Life Among the Pirates* or many of the several books by pirate expert, Marcus Rediker, not least his *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*. Here we find men transported to foreign coasts who have escaped the



powers that brought them there. What are they to do now? Their answer was to live for themselves.

But let us turn to Max Stirner at this juncture and his almost singular feat in his life, the book *The Unique and Its Property* (in the Wolfi Landstreicher translation that I will here be using) that is often instead called *The Ego and Its Own*. What I aim to show here is how Stirner's egoism and the piratical mindset or temperament were, at the very least, compatible if, in fact, pirates weren't egoists before Stirner had even written about what that meant. This begins, in fact, in the topical layout of Stirner's book in which he opposes a section on "Humanity" in the first part to a part on "I" in the second part. The second is slightly longer. This second part is subdivided into sections on "Ownness", "The Owner" and "The Unique" and if we remember this is all to be contrasted with a first section on "Humanity" we can perhaps see the force of the comparison. Stirner is not talking about ideal or imaginary collectivities here but material singularities: the "I", the owner, the unique. That is what matters to him.

The second part of *The Unique and Its Property* is headed with the following text:

*"At the entrance of the modern era stands the 'God-man.' Will only the God in the God-man evaporate at its exit, and can the God-man really die if only the God in him dies? They didn't think of this question, and considered themselves finished, when in our day they brought the work of the Enlightenment, the overcoming of God, to a victorious end. They didn't notice that the human being has killed God in order to now become 'sole God on high.' The other world outside us is indeed swept away, and the great enterprise of the men of the Enlightenment is accomplished; but the other world inside us has become a new heaven and calls us forth to storm the heavens once again: God has had to make way, but not for us,*

*rather for-humanity. How can you believe the God-man has died before the man in him, as well as the God, has died?"*

This text was written roughly 120 years after the major Atlantic pirates were swiftly being wiped out by the forces of various European governments. It sets out Stirner's essential problematic: if, at the imagined pinnacle of our thinking, all we are doing is simply replacing "God" with "Humanity" then the only thing that has changed is the name of the deity. Nothing fundamental has changed; we are still theists; we still seek to have, and to revere, something as sacred. And Stirner determined that there should be nothing sacred for the human being for that human being would never be free that did have something thought of in such a way.

Stirner begins by talking about "ownness", a translation of the German "Eigenheit" which can also mean "property" or "individuality" or even "originality". It is about, as Landstreicher in his notes puts it, "what distinguishes a particular individual". Stirner links this to freedom but not simply as a freedom which is loosed from particular chains but as a freedom which is put to use by and for one's ownness:

*"What use is a freedom to you, if it contributes nothing? And if you became free from everything, you would no longer have anything; because freedom is lacking in content. For one who doesn't know how to use it, this useless permission has no value; but how I make use of it depends on my ownness. I have no objection to freedom, but I want more than freedom for you: you should not just be rid of what you don't want, you should also have what you want; you should not just be a 'freeman;' you should also be an 'owner.'"*

This becomes the belief that freedom itself can be an empty phantom that becomes something sacred, a holy grail to chase after, when what is actually required is one's ownness:

*"ownness is my whole essence and existence, it is myself. I am free from what I am rid of, owner of what I have in my power, what I control. I am at all times and under every circumstance my own, if I know how to have myself and do not waste myself on others."*

Stirner is, thus, arguing that "freedom" simply doesn't work, it is empty, a negative, a freedom from restrictions but to absolutely nothing. One cannot make "freedom", one can only wish for it. But, imagines Stirner, we are always our own and we can always actualise this. Exasperated, Stirner writes:

*"You all want freedom, you want freedom. So why do you haggle over more or less? Freedom can only be the whole of freedom; a piece of freedom is not freedom. Do you despair of the possibility of getting the whole of freedom, freedom from all, indeed do you take it for madness to even wish for it? Well then, give up chasing after phantoms, and spend your efforts on something better than – the unattainable."*

His response to this, some sentences later, is:

*"Therefore turn to yourselves rather than to your gods and idols. Bring out of yourselves what is in you, bring it to light, bring yourselves out as manifestation."*

Stirner argues that a religious cast of mind has, in fact, befuddled the West. We are taught by it to think of ourselves as fallen and degraded beings. Stirner actually uses the

words "devils" which is not irrelevant in a context of pirates that cultivated a certain consciousness of being "sea devils" and familiars of "Jolly Roger" (i.e. the Devil):

*"the habit of religious thinking has biased our minds so grievously that in our nakedness and naturalness, we - terrify ourselves; it has degraded us so that we consider ourselves depraved, born devils."*

Stirner's concern, however, is that "the main thing" is "egoism or ownness". And so: "everyone must tell himself: I am my everything and I do everything and I do everything for my own sake." Stirner considers this ownness as that thing which gets us free from gods and their sacredness and it does this because it "is the creator of everything". Thus, if "freedom" is ever to mean anything we must exploit its possibilities to the full. You are free to be anything and everything you can be and free to pursue freedom from "everything that is not you, not I, not we." Thus, the one being spoken about here is "the core that is to be delivered from all wrappings". Therefore:

*"Think it over well and decide whether you want to put on your banner the dream of 'freedom' or the resolution of 'egoism;' of 'ownness.' 'Freedom' rouses your rage against everything that is not you; 'egoism' calls you to joy over yourselves, to self-enjoyment. 'Freedom' is and remains a longing, a romantic lament, a Christian hope for otherworldliness and the future; 'ownness; is a reality that, from itself, removes just as much unfreedom as hinders you by barring your own way. You will not want to renounce what doesn't bother you, and when it starts to bother you, why, you know that 'you must obey yourselves rather than men'!"*

Here “ownness” sounds strongly reminiscent of the pirate mentality of carousing and self-enjoyment, one which at least attempts to remove the “unfreedom” in their way as they set their own course through life. Pirates set their own targets and purposes for their lives and gave themselves their own rules of association. They dreamt of no future imagined state because their business was their ownness and so their natural concern was obeying their own desires in the here and now. Pirates would probably be bemused if someone like Gabriel Kuhn had appeared to them back in the day asking why they weren’t working towards some kind of free world pirate state or utopia. But the answer should be obvious once “ownness” is taken into account. “Ownness” is simply the desire to create from yourself and to obey yourselves. “Ownness” is about ridding yourself of everything of which you want rid and regarding what is left as what you have accepted for and from yourself. Stirner in fact regards the own one as the truly free-born rather than the one who lusts after an abstract, unattainable freedom which, says Stirner, simply makes such a one a “freedom addict”. Therefore:

*“The former is free from the beginning, because he recognizes nothing but himself; he does not need to free himself first, because from the start he rejects everything outside himself, because he prizes nothing more than himself, deems nothing higher than himself-in short, because he starts from himself and ‘comes to himself’. Constrained by filial respect, he is still already working to ‘free’ himself of this constraint. Ownness works in the little egoist and gets him the desired freedom.*

*Thousands of years of civilized culture have obscured what you are to you, have made you believe that you are not egoists, but are called to be idealists (‘good people’) . Shake that off! Don't seek for freedom, which just deprives you of yourselves, in ‘self-denial’; but rather seek yourselves, become egoists, each one of you become an almighty I. Or more clearly:*

*recognize yourselves again, recognize what you actually are, and let go of your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish addiction to be something other than what you are."*

Thus, no part of egoism in Stirner's understanding is about being some kind of idealistic "good people" or "good person". It is not a utopian thing. In the same way, and to the extent that pirates were also egoists, they were absolutely not utopian either. It would be an affront to, and a misunderstanding of, their mentality to imagine they ever should have been. Such egoism, whether Stirner's or pirate, is not about creating ideal states or situations: it is simply about what you are. It is about "safeguard(ing) my freedom against the world" which is a matter of "mak(ing) the world my own" as a matter of force (a certain connection with pirates who were unfazed about using force to achieve their aims). It is about having the confidence and conscience to act on one's own behalf and is therefore highly equatable with what anarchists call "direct action" - which is both action to secure your own interests but also the philosophy that only this really ever does such a thing. It is, I think, in this understanding that Stirner writes that "My freedom becomes complete only when it is my – power." Using my power is what makes me an own person and not merely a freedom addict. "You long for freedom? You fools! If you took power, then freedom would come of itself. See, one who has power stands above the law." I understand this in the sense "take power (and thus responsibility for yourself) into your own hands" for "ownness" is supremely taking the matter of your own self into your own hands. Consequently, "all freedom is essentially – self-liberation, i.e., that I can only have as much freedom as I can get through my ownness".

Stirner here, in a suitable marine metaphor, contrasts emancipation (being set free) with the egoist's freedom of ownness which is a constant self-liberation. He typifies the one set free as a "freedman", one "dragging along a piece of chain" behind them. Such a

person imagines to be free but really isn't. Rather than being "self-liberated", the greater thing for Stirner, he is merely the emancipated. Stirner says that the reason the liberal hates the egoist is because "the egoist... never strives for any thing for the thing's sake: the thing must serve him." It is thus ownness that the liberal hates and that because it defies their own idealism and utopianism and contrasts its abstract collectivity and generality with concrete, individual specificity. Ownness, concludes Stirner, "has no alien standard, as it is not an idea like freedom, morality, humanity, etc. It is only a description of – the owner."

The next section of Stirner's book, which is on "The Owner", is the vast majority of the rest of the book. In it, Stirner takes aim at Liberalism, "Humanity" and "Equality" as idealisms which view the only material reality – the fact of our concrete individual existence and relations – as something to be despised in favour of the interlocking idealisms just named. Stirner prescribes these things as carrying on "the Christian point of view, according to which one is for the other nothing but a concept" in an idealistic fiction which ignores the reality of material existence and individual interest (i.e. the unique and their property). So we become not our own interacting concrete realities but "the human race" or "humanity", members of an idealistic class, and can be imagined as of equal importance, etc., in a way analogous to things like "the children of God", etc. Stirner, of course, grants that we are all members of the same species but he regards this as "the slightest thing about us". He regards this as but a quality of a person as if one were to label them as a member of their home town, for example. Effectively, Stirner is saying, "So what?" to this for all it does is classify a person. It has regard for a quality of a person rather than the person themselves. Liberalism, for him, becomes simply secular Christianity, a "human religion", "the final metamorphosis of the Christian religion". Of interest for anarchists is that it is also denominated "the state-religion". Thus:

*"One could call it the state-religion, the religion of 'free states:' not in the sense, used up to now, that it is preferred or privileged by the state, but as the religion which the 'free state' is not only entitled, but is compelled, to demand of each of its people, regardless of whether privately he is Jewish, Christian, or whatever. For it does the same service to the state as filial piety does to the family. If the family is to be recognized and maintained in its continued existence, by each of its members, the ties of blood must be sacred to him, and his feeling for it must be that of piety, of respect for the ties of blood, so that for him every blood relation becomes a sacred being. So also for every member of the state-community, this community must be sacred, and the concept that is highest for the state must also be highest for him.*

*But what concept is highest for the state? Surely, to be a truly human society: a society into which everyone who is really a human being, i.e., not an inhuman monster, can gain admittance as a member. No matter how far state tolerance goes, it stops at the inhuman monster and what is inhuman. And yet, this 'inhuman monster' is a human being, and the 'inhuman' itself is something human, indeed, possible only to a human being, not to any beast; it is simply something 'humanly possible.' But even though every inhuman monster is a human being, still the state excludes him, i.e., locks him up, or transforms him from a state-comrade to a prison-comrade (a lunatic asylum- or hospital-comrade for communism)."*

What matters for that state, thinks Stirner, is that one is appropriately human, that one conforms. To not conform or to refuse to conform is to be or become inhuman (e.g. like a pirate). That directly contradicts his egoistic outlook on life in which he sees not examples of a class of conformists but self-actualised owners of themselves. But there are further consequences of a state religion of humanity:



*"If the state must count on our humanity, then it's the same when one says: it must count on your morality. To see the humanity in each other and to act as human beings toward each other, this is called moral behavior. It is in every way the 'spiritual love' of Christianity. If, thus, I see the humanity in you, as I see the humanity in me, and see nothing but the humanity, then I take care of you the way I take care of myself, because we both signify nothing but the mathematical proposition:  $A = C$  and  $B = C$ , therefore  $A = B$ , i.e., I am nothing but a human being and you are nothing but a human being, thus I and you are the same. Morality is not compatible with egoism, because it doesn't accept me, but only the humanity in me. But if the state is a society of human beings, not a union of Is, each of whom only looks out for himself, then it cannot exist without morality and must attach importance to morality.*

*Therefore, the two of us, the state and I, are enemies. For me, the egoist, the welfare of this 'human society' is not in my heart. I sacrifice nothing to it, I only use it; but to be able to use it completely, I transform it instead into my property and my creation; in other words, I destroy it and in its place form the association of egoists."*

This, of course, sounds exactly like Renzo Novatore and it should for he at least partly got it from here. State society, so Stirner is saying, operates according to a kind of idealistic mathematics of right and wrong behaviour when it is appropriately moral – and this takes no account of individual existence or interest because these things are irrelevant to it. So, as Stirner says shortly after this passage, state society "imposes being human... as a duty." But egoists (and anarchists under the flag of Jolly Roger's anarchy as I show by exemplifying the current articles of this at the end of this book) know no duty and vow to hold nothing sacred. They seek an association of self-actualised egoists (an example of which we may suggest are exactly the pirates) and not the forced moral duty of being members of an

entirely imaginary “humanity”, a moral-political construction. The important thing for this construction, so Stirner intimates, is its own continuance first and foremost; all else is at best a secondary consideration. This continuance is then meant to be held as something sacred by all those designated by and within it. “Liberalism” or “state-society” “intends to realise humanity” which means to create a world for it. It is directly contrary to the concrete and unique individual or their interest. “The human being”, thinks Stirner in this sense, “is only an ideal”.

Stirner here conceives that it is not the task of a human being to be *generally* human. Indeed, he thinks the human being’s humanity, such as it is in his and not liberal, state terms, in the terms of the religion of humanity, is *in being oneself, in displaying one’s uniqueness*. He thinks that each individual human being is the species – yet without norm, law or model. It is not for an idealistic “humanity” to make something out of him but for him to make something out of himself as a human being. The human being, in this sense, is never generally and idealistically defined but specifically and individually lived and actualised. Thus, the egoist cannot go along with a liberal and state religion of humanity which would, as its first order of business, require the individual’s self-denial. Furthermore, such a one refuses to hold anything sacred – including both “humanity” and “the state”. The egoist must become thoroughly anti-religious and even if the religion manifests in secular and liberal form. The egoist is “the enemy of every higher power” whereas “Liberalism” and “humanity” teach only obeisance to such things.

Stirner thus even conceives that the religion of humanity that is Liberalism is a new configuration of feudalism:

*"If in the so-called feudal time we held everything as a fief from God, we find in the liberal period the same feudal relationship occurring with humanity. God was the lord, now the human being is the lord; God was the mediator, now the human being is; God was the spirit, now the human being is. In this three-fold way, the feudal relation has undergone a transformation. For now, first of all, we hold our power as a fief from all-powerful humanity, and because this power comes from a higher being, it is not called power or force, but rather 'right': 'human rights'; we further hold our position in the world as a fiefdom it, because it, the mediator mediates our intercourse, which therefore may not be other than 'human'; finally, we hold ourselves as a fief from it, that is, our own value, or all that we are worth, for we are worth exactly nothing when it does not dwell in us, and when or where we are not 'human'. The power is humanity's, the world is humanity's, I am humanity's."*

Now here I do not mean to argue in any of this that any pirates were possessed of Stirner's mentality. They were not Stirnerites (and, in terms of Atlantic pirates, lived and died well over a century before him). Yet neither did they imagine that either their rights or their property were granted to them by the liberal state or that they should act according to a "human" morality the state imposed upon them or that they were to be its willing serfs. They thought, perhaps not in so many words, what Stirner now says here: "My power is my property. My power gives me property. My power am I myself, and through it I am my property." This is pertinent when Stirner talks about "My Power" for he argues that all the liberal rights states afford are "alien right"; they are not rights we give ourselves, rights we take and demand, but rights the state concedes or gives to us (which are obviously to be of primary benefit to it as well as being entirely at its discretion). The liberal state, with its "humanity" and "morality", can't stop poking its nose in and deciding what you are and are not allowed to do, think or express. This only gets more onerous with each and every new law it creates. Neither pirates nor Stirner accepted this

proposition: both determined that they make their own right (rights, law) for themselves. They were, and should be, beholden to no one else, let alone fictive and idealistic entities like the state.

Here Stirner intimates that the logic of “right” has infected all those who live under Liberalism. “Rights of society” or “human rights” or “the right of all” are touted as the most important rights of all in ways to be (in theory but never in practice) equally applied. Every such right is imagined, in this logic, as more important than any right I might feign to give myself – and this necessarily so. As a consequence (and Stirner is not slow to draw it), “the individual becomes society’s slave”. An individual human being in state society only has rights that society grants to them. Such a person is consequently required to show both loyalty and obedience to such a state although they have almost certainly never been asked, in a completely uncoerced way (or even in any way), to assent to such things nor even to the state’s existence in the first place! State society simply delegates you “rights” whether you like it or not and then polices you accordingly. Stirner, as you might imagine, completely rejects this situation – as did the pirates before him when they “went upon the account” as it was called. Both agreed that people themselves grant and make their rights (Stirner adds here that “human beings have no rights at all by nature”). These are matters of their power and not of obedience or loyalty to fictive others or their officers and agents. Consequently, Stirner argues:

*“what you have the power to be, you have the right to. I derive all right and authorization from myself; I am entitled to everything that I have the power for. I am entitled to overthrow Zeus, Jehovah, God, etc., if I can...”*

*I decide whether it is the right in me; outside me there is no right. If it is right for me, then it is right. Possibly, this won't make it right for others; that's their problem, not mine: they may defend themselves. And if something wasn't right for the whole world, but was right for me, i.e., I wanted it, then I would ask nothing about the whole world. This is what everyone does who knows how to value himself, everyone to the degree that he is an egoist, because power goes before right, and that quite rightly."*

We can easily imagine that pirates thought little differently about this and that this was an important aspect of their practical politics when dealing with others (such as Royal Navy or merchant shipping).

Stirner makes an interesting point at this juncture which has general political application and which I have mentioned before in *Black Flag* in interaction with the postanarchist discussions of Saul Newman (for which see the essay below on "Postanarchy"). This is summed up in Stirner's sentence: "If servility ceased, it would be all over for lordship". Stirner's idea is that all lordship, all authority, requires subservience, a desire, willing or coerced, to obey. If this is not present or cannot be coerced then there can be no authority for authority requires people to have authority over rather than massed ranks that are prepared to vigorously refuse and defy it. Pirates, in fact, were and are such people and so are appropriate examples of Stirner's principle. In having our "own will", says Stirner, we destroy the state – for the state only effectively exists if we acquiesce in its fictive existence, support its institutions, obey its officers, etc. Our own will and state will are thus formally in opposition and the latter requires the breaking of the former in order to exist. The state must then formally oppose individual will and portray it as generally dangerous in order to prosper itself. And so it does. People who "want to do their own thing" are to this day smeared as weird and dangerous, as threats to general

polity and peace. But Stirner's response to this is simple: "Every state is a despotism, whether the despot be one or many." Every law is thus an imposition on individual ownness, every demand for obedience to the state a coercion. How do I, the unique with my own power and my own property, change this?

*"Only by recognizing no duty, i.e., by not binding myself or allowing myself to be bound. If I have no duty, then I also know no law.*

*'But they will bind me!' No one can bind my will, and my unwillingness remains free.*

*'Why, everything would have to go topsy-turvy, if everyone could do what he wanted!' Well, who says that everyone can do everything? What are you there for then, you who don't need to put up with everything? Defend yourself, and no one will do anything to you! Anyone who wants to break your will is dealing with you, and is your enemy. Act against him as such. If a few million stand behind you for your protection, then you are an imposing power and will have an easy victory. But even if you impress your opponent as a power, still you are not therefore a sacred authority; he must then be a thief. He does not owe you respect or esteem, so long as he looks out for your power.*

*We are accustomed to classifying states according to the different ways in which 'the supreme power' is distributed. If one individual has it-monarchy; if all-democracy; etc. So the supreme power! Power against whom? Against the individual and his 'self-will.' The state practices 'violence;' the individual should not do this. State behavior is an act of violence, and it calls its violence 'legal right'; that of the individual, 'crime'. Crime, so the violence of the individual is called; and he overcomes state violence only through crime, when he is of the opinion that the state is not above him, but that he is above the state."*

Here, so Stirner is saying, the state is a secular God and operates on the same *a priori* principle: it claims to set the terms of your existence, to demand absolute obedience, and to decide what you may and may not do, designating those who disobey as criminals, the adjunct to the religious sinner. It reserves the right to punish with violence as a consequence and in none of this is it ever going to ask for your permission to operate in such a way. It is simply God, I am, the supreme authority. The egoistic principle (and politics) here, to the contrary, is "What does it matter to me what the state (or its citizens) think valid or in order?" As a result Stirner draws the conclusion that:

*"Only from the principle that all right and all power belong to the collectivity of the people do all governments arise. Because none of them lacks this appeal to the collectivity, and the despot as well as the president or any aristocracy, etc., acts and commands 'in the name of the state.' They are in possession of 'state power.'"*

We, thinks Stirner, should then practise "unruliness" and "complete disobedience" if we want to defeat the state. And what other than this did pirates actually do (without, the siren voices cry, ultimately defeating the state)? It is Stirner's conclusion as a result of this state logic which is drilled into the brain of every state citizen from birth that "the people is full of police attitude through and through." And they are. *One even finds people calling themselves anarchists who are published on anarchist libraries who are writing essays and books which effectively set out their formulations of anarchist police states, states in which the anarchists are the police. What this copthink has to do with anarchy, a leaderless, stateless, authority-lacking state of human affairs made up of people who organise themselves on principles of autonomy, agency and free association, I have no idea.* But some people, often Americans, seem to think that being an anarchist amounts to becoming a police state, but a properly motivated police state run by "the good people" –

which is, of course, a group entirely coterminous with they themselves. Such abject and stupid nonsense would not be tolerated by the egoistic Stirner who insists on his right, his power and his property, nor by the pirates, who minded their own business and left other people not of their company to mind their own business too. Both are more anarchist than such self-deceived “anarchist” do-gooders of “benevolent coercion” will ever be and a better example of how copthink infects the liberal state citizen it is difficult to find.

Stirner argues all this I have so far been discussing on the basis that neither human (i.e. collective) nor divine reason are actually existing entities. They are concepts, ideals, imaginary things. A real person’s operating reason is an existing thing. It is articulated in and through the life of that person. It is actual, as Stirner would suggest. Consequently, one cannot (and perhaps should not) act in accordance with non-existent and imaginary things. One should use one’s own reason, one’s ownness, one’s uniqueness, one’s interest, to articulate one’s life. Abstractions like “human rights” or “human reason” have nothing to do with this and are entirely made up. Stirner, throughout his book, is concerned to exorcise ghosts and these are just some more of them. Consequently, Stirner states:

*“I demand no right, so I also don't need to recognize any. What I am able to get by force I get by force, and I have no right to what I don't get by force, and I don't boast of or console myself with my inalienable rights.”*

Or, in other words, make your bed and lie in it. Rely on your own direct action. This is the way.

Stirner pursues similar thinking when he talks about “My Intercourse”. Here, for example, “the common good is not my good” and “a freedom of the people is not my freedom”. I



hope that, by now, readers are getting the point and the logic of this. Liberalism, says Stirner:

*"appears to be the last attempt of the creation of the freedom of the people, a freedom of the community, of 'society,' of the universal, of humanity, the dream of a humanity, a people, a community, a 'society,' that has come of age."*

All that concerns Stirner about this, however, is that "A people cannot be free except at the expense of the individual" and he would rather have free individuals who form their own self-actualising associations (e.g. pirates) rather than a free people that coerce and terrorise the individual – as they inevitably do. (Anarchists who build fantastical and completely unworkable benevolent police states in their heads are very good at this.) This is also why he wishes nothing sacred for "Everything sacred is a tie, a fetter." And collectivities do love their dogmas (and to coerce others to them). Consequently, Stirner is of the view that "As long as even one institution exists which the individual may not dismantle, my ownness and self-possession are still very far away" and this is pirate logic too if we are to believe they formulated their own articles of association and allowed any who didn't bind themselves to a particular one, and so a particular crew, to walk away unmolested (where they would likely form their own more acceptable articles with willing others). The difference here is the voluntary concept, one I argue is a pillar of anarchist relations but is anathema to states and institutional authority. In general, then, if you cannot walk away from something, if it is not voluntary, it should not exist. This, "intercourse", in Stirner's sense, "is mutuality, it is the action, the *commercium*, of individuals" whereas "society is only the commonality of the room". What Stirner seeks is people's self-actualised, self-articulated and self-organised association, a truly and always

voluntary thing. As such, his model of human relationship stands opposed to states which are objects of arbitrary force and coercion. As he says a few pages later:

*"the independent existence of the state establishes my lack of independence; its 'naturalness,' its organism, demands that my nature doesn't grow freely, but is cut to fit it. So that it can develop naturally, it applies the shears of 'civilization' to me ; it gives me an education and culture suitable to it, not me, and teaches me, for example, to respect the law, to abstain from the violation of state property (i.e., private property), to revere a divine and earthly sovereignty, etc.; in short, it teaches me to not be culpable, by which I mean to 'sacrifice' my ownness to 'sacredness' (everything possible is sacred; for example, property, the lives of others, etc.). This is the sort of civilization and culture the state is able to give me; it teaches me to be a 'useful tool,' a 'useful member of society.' Every state must do this, the people's state as well as the absolute or constitutional states."*

The egoists, however, Stirner conceives of as "ungovernable". They refuse all institutionalisation. They resist being "Christianised". They are outlaws defying the State. But if what Stirner wants is an association of self-actualised, self-organising egoists or, as he puts it elsewhere in the section on "My Intercourse", that "the self-owned will fight for self-willed unity, for association", then a question suggests itself. What is the "property" in the phrase "the unique and its property"? Here, in a footnote to the text, Wolfi Landstreicher suggests an answer. In discussing an argument Stirner makes about bees and their "beehood" and Germans and their "Germanhood", Landstreicher notices that the German used is similar to that used when Stirner talks about the unique's property. From this he concludes that, "My property is my 'ownhood', that is, it is what makes me my own". We might then interpretively rephrase Stirner's book title as "The Unique and Its Ownhood" and this more properly gets across what Stirner is about in his text as a

subject. He is discussing each unique one of us and its significance, its reality, its existence, its political import, and how a Liberal, Christianising, cast of thought betrays and denies that as a simple feature of its ideology. Because for political liberals, as for Christians, your uniqueness, your ownhood, is an irrelevance. What matters for these people is the whole and that it should be maintained a certain way and to a certain standard. The individual's concerns and interests are possible obstacles to this purpose, unimportant annoyances, possible crimes or sins, and so nothing that should be accorded any significance by such ways of thinking. Stirner's text is then about how and why the unique one fights back in the cause of their ownness, their significance and their reality – and not least how the egoist replies to the state: "Get out of my sun!"

An important aspect of this is the subject of "association". I have been saying all along in my anarchist texts that anarchists believe in "free (or voluntary) association" and this is something in which Stirner himself has an interest. In talking here about "parties" (that is, partisanship, parties of the political rather than the having fun sort) Stirner wants to differentiate the party, which binds, from the association, which does not. He writes:

*"the party stops being an association at the same moment in which it makes certain principles binding and wants to know that they are safe against attack; but this moment is precisely the act of birth of the party. Already, as a party, it is a born society, a dead association, and an idea that has become fixed."*

Fixed ideas, of course, things which become, or can become, sacred, are *verboden* here. They are not of the character of the association which is flexible, open, fundamentally self-serving (where this is not understood in the Christian/liberal way and judged negatively but in Stirner's egoistic way and so judged positively). The party, insists Stirner,

cannot tolerate non-partisanship. As in Orwell's "two minutes hate", the party is watching how committed you are to its programme. It cannot tolerate lack of enthusiasm. It sees it as dissent. But of the egoist Stirner says:

*"What does the party matter to me? I'll still find enough to associate with me without having to swear to my flag... ownness knows no commandment of 'faithfulness, devotion, etc.;' ownness allows everything, even desertion, defection."*

And this talk of flags begs a relevant question: were pirates in an association, in these terms, or a party? They were, I maintain, in an association. Yes, pirates had rules, and they would be judged by them by their peers. But no one was in a pirate crew to begin with that hadn't made a choice to be so. Pirates didn't force anyone else to be a pirate or to sail with any particular crew (although it was normal for them to give captured sailing crews the choice to join them or not – which is to be compared with state navies who simply impressed people). It was all entirely voluntary and a matter of each's ownness. One obligated, if obligation is what it was, oneself in and to piracy on the high seas. This includes one's obligations under the pirate articles of association which laid out the basic terms of relations between the pirates and how they would operate, who would be captain and quartermaster, etc. No one had to agree to these things and anyone could walk away if, for any reason that seemed good to them, it did not suit them. This, in Stirner's terms, is not the logic of the party but of the association, a logic of voluntary society formulated through voluntary relationships made by people who decide their own lives according to their own perceived interests.

But, to ask Stirner's own question, "Are the own or unique perhaps a party?":

*"How could they be own if they were those who belonged to a party?*

*Or should one not deal with any party? Just by associating with them and entering into their circle one forms an association with them that lasts just so long as the party and I have one and the same goal. But today I still share the party's tendency, and by tomorrow I can no longer do so and I become 'unfaithful' to it. The party has nothing binding (obligatory) for me, and I don't respect it; if I no longer like it, I become its enemy.*

*In every party that upholds itself and its existence, the members are unfree, or better unown, to the degree that they lack egoism, that they serve the desire of the party. The independence of the party requires the lack of independence of the party members.*

*A party, of whatever sort it may be, can never do without a confession of faith. Because those who belong to the party must believe in its principles, they must not doubt or question it, it must be what is certain, what is unquestionable for the party member. This means: one must belong to a party body and soul, otherwise one is not truly a party man, but rather more or less an egoist. Entertain any doubt of Christianity and you are already no longer a true Christian, you have lifted yourself to the 'audacity' of raising a question about it and hauling it before your egoistic judgment seat. You have sinned against Christianity, this party cause... But good for you, if you don't let yourself be frightened: your audacity helps you to ownness.*

*So then can an egoist ever seize onto or take up with a party? Yes, only he can't let the party seize onto or take him. The party remains at all times nothing but a game for him; he is in the game, he takes part."*

Now in the sense that a state is a party (in some cases, of course, it literally has been) this raises an issue for the associationist. States, to some degree, require loyalty and the best state would then be the one with the most loyal citizens (i.e. partisans). (This would actually be a totalitarian nightmare, the realisation of the total police state.) This would also be that state in which absolutely everyone held the same things sacred – not least the authority and sanctity of the state itself – as prescribed pre-eminently by states in law. But what Stirner says of his egoist is that “in all cases where his advantage runs up against the state, (the egoist) can only satisfy himself through crime.” So the state views all people as potential criminals even as the church views all people as potential, if not actual, sinners. The egoist, however, is a criminal on purpose, as a matter of their determination, for the egoist knows that the state quite rightly views them as the enemy. There is no possibility for cooperation between the egoist and the state for their interests are always and forever opposed. The one wishes to control and contain the other whilst the other refuses to be either controlled or contained. Just, in fact, like pirates and the state for pirates were deliberate criminals, criminals on purpose, people who, in their decision to take to a life of piracy, defied entire political, moral and economic ways of life in the process. One of the things they were also doing in that, although they almost certainly didn’t know it in Stirner’s terms, was choosing the association over the party, the voluntary life over the coerced life. It is just that the voluntary life is also the criminal life – at least it is if you are a state. From the point of view of a state not only must you be coerced but you must also willingly accept your coercion. The egoist, however, like the pirate, neither accepts their coercion nor that they must be coerced.

It is important to see here that statism or Liberalism or “humanity” are moral programmes and even moral imperatives from their point of view. For the egoist this is what is bad about them for the egoist can have nothing to do with morality, another bind on their

ownness. So in crime, for example (and here Renzo Novatore is a superb example), the egoist asserts themselves against society and mocks all that is sacred. There is a passage in Stirner which Novatore in fact echoes, if not exactly quotes, several times which articulates this:

*"In crime the egoist has up to now asserted himself and mocked the sacred; the breaking with the sacred, or rather of the sacred, can become general. A revolution never returns, but an immense, reckless, shameless, conscienceless, proud crime, doesn't it rumble in the distant thunder, and don't you see how the sky grows ominously silent and gloomy?"*

Thus:

*"Under religion and politics, the human being is situated at the standpoint of should: he should become this or that, he should be so and so. Everyone brings this postulate, this commandment, not only up before others, but also before himself."*

Morality is the mentality of "should" but egoism is the mentality of "I will". Morality emphasises an abstract and idealistic collective interest (even if through a personal incident or situation for it is always something that could and should be applicable to all) whereas egoism emphasises the unique's material interest (yet also as a universally applicable thing whilst still being about the unique). The former, so Stirner argues, absorbs the unique into a characteristic of the human ("the human" being the important thing) whereas the latter gives physical existence to the human through its uniqueness. The human being for Stirner is then not an abstract, an essence, an idea – it is each and every concrete, existing, unique one. Life, thinks Stirner, should not matter in the abstract. It does and can only mean what it means to me (or to you, in each case a specific,

indeed unique, life). But if this is the case then it is the case for everything for the concrete reality is our own existence and our own existence as unique and as our own. This, in turn, is what motivates our “selfishness” or, in other words, our own direct action to prosper our own interest (which may always include those of any we are voluntarily in association with).

This is exemplified if, for instance, we consider something like property (that which pirates, as one example, considered theirs to take if it was within their power to take it). Critiquing Proudhon’s assertion in *What is Property?* (written only a few years before Stirner’s text) that “property is theft”, Stirner replies that:

*“Proudhon... believes he is saying the worst about property when he calls it theft (vo[]). Completely leaving aside the embarrassing question of what well-founded objection one could make against theft, we only ask: Is the concept of ‘theft’ at all possible unless one lets the concept of ‘property’ count? How can one steal if property doesn't yet exist? What belongs to no one cannot be stolen; you don't steal the water that you draw from the sea. Consequently, property is not theft, but a theft becomes possible only through property... Private property lives only by the grace of the law. Only in law does it have its guarantee—indeed, possession is not yet property, it is only ‘mine’ by consent of the law; it isn't a fact, un fait as Proudhon says, but a fiction, a thought. This is legal property, legitimate property, guaranteed property. It is mine not by me but by law.”*

This is, in fact, a genius insight. There can be no “theft” unless one first grants that there can ever be any kind of “property” – even if this is the legal fiction of such a thing; one must have the latter before the former makes sense. Property, however, is a matter of power in the end for it is the assertion that, as Stirner says, I have “unlimited control over



something” – and that to the exclusion of all others. That being so, all abstractions and moralities and idealisms about property are just so much empty articulation for property is just that which I can make my own and put under my control. As Stirner then says, “What I have in my power, that is my own.” This will seem like madness to the liberal or the Christian but then why are we required to be either of these things? The pirate was not either of these things. The egoist is not either of these things either. The anarchist should certainly not be either of these things. And so none of these things should have the morality of the Christian or the liberal either. Our egoistic ethic as a consequence is then clear:

*“To whoever knows how to take and hold the thing, it belongs, until someone takes it away from him, as freedom belongs to the one who takes it.”*

There is no waiting or hoping to be given here, no subservient dependency. One acts, directly, one takes, one acquires one’s needs and wants. “Only power decides about property.” As every pirate who ever sailed the seven seas knows very well.

But it is about more than even this “selfish” attitude carried out in the service of “ownhood”. For there is the issue of human relations to consider. We have already covered in the pages directly above how Stirner imagines the State is coercive – and necessarily so in pursuance of its own interests. But this extends – of course – to poking its nose into every relationship:

*“The state cannot tolerate that human being stand in direct relationship to human being; it has to come between as mediator, has to intervene.”*

The state, that is, cannot tolerate the voluntary relationships of unique people who own themselves. It must interfere, poke its nose in, protect itself from what these suspicious and nefarious people might do. The state is, thus, a policeman – and it loves policing and police. Freedom, autonomy, genuine liberty, these are the last things it loves. The state hates “association” in Stirner’s sense of the term. The state, in fact, not only wants to control human relations, it wants to control every unique one too:

*“The state allows me to utilize all my thoughts and to bring them to everyone (indeed, I already utilize them, for example, through this, that they bring honour to me from the listeners, and the like); but only so long as my thoughts are its thoughts. On the other hand, if I harbour thoughts of which it doesn't approve, i.e., which it can't make its own, then it doesn't allow me to utilize them at all, to bring them into exchange, into intercourse. My thoughts are free only when they are granted to me by the state's grace, i.e., if they are the state's thoughts. It allows me to philosophize freely only insofar as I prove myself as a 'state philosopher'; though I am not allowed to philosophize against the state, it also looks upon it gladly when I help it out of its 'deficiencies,' 'advancing' it. Therefore, since I'm only allowed to act as I myself as the state graciously permits, with its certificate of legitimacy and police pass, so too it is not allowed to me to utilize what is mine, unless this is shown to be its, which I hold as a fief from it. My ways must be its ways or it will seize me; my thoughts, its thoughts, or else it stops my mouth.”*

This, to be clear, is not what some states do – as if there were good and bad states. *It is what any state must do in order to be a state.* Since we are now in a world made up of states, a world in which nowhere is not claimed by and for a state, we all have the same problem: the entity of the state wants to control us. How do we respond? Stirner’s egoistic response is clear:

*"But, in opposition to the state, I feel more and more clearly that a great power is still left to me, power over myself, i.e., over everything that is suitable only to me and that only is, in being my own.*

*What do I do if my ways are no longer its ways, my thoughts no longer its thoughts? I look to myself, and ask nothing of it! In my thoughts, which I get sanctioned by no assent, no permission, no grace, I have my actual property, a property with which I can carry on trade. Because as mine they are my creations, and I am in a position to give them away in return for other thoughts: I give them up and in exchange for them take others, which are then my newly bought property.*

*What then is my property? Nothing but what is in my power! To what property am I entitled? To any to which I empower myself I give myself property rights by taking property to myself, or giving myself the property owner's power, full power, empowerment.*

*That over which I have power that others cannot snatch from me remains my property; well then, let power decide upon property, and I will expect everything from my power! Alien power, power that I leave to another, makes me a bondsman; so may my own power make me an owner. May I then pull back the power that I have conceded to others out of ignorance about the strength of my own power! May I say to myself, where my power reaches, that is my property, and may I lay claim to everything as property that I feel myself strong enough to attain, and may I get my actual property to extend as far as I authorize, i.e., empower, myself to take.*

*Here egoism, selfishness must decide; not the principle of love, not love motives like compassion, charity, kindness, or even justice and fairness (because iustitia too is a*

*phenomenon of love, a love product): love recognizes only sacrifices and calls for 'self-sacrifice.'*

*Egoism has no intention of sacrificing anything, of giving up anything; it simply decides: what I need I must have and will get for myself."*

To this we might add "the rabble only stops being rabble when it seizes" – seizes like a pirate, in fact; when it refuses states and nations and moralities and expectations and creates a new right, and a new basis of human relationship in association, from its own will and desire; when it creates a new responsibility, a self-responsibility; when it throws off the old yoke of control and puts on the yoke of self actualisation; when it ceases being a dependent of "civilisation" and instead becomes an outlaw from it. But why? Because:

*"If people reach the point where they lose respect for property, then everyone will have property, as all slaves become free people as soon as they no longer respect the master as master. Associations will then, in this matter as well, multiply the individual's means and secure his contested property."*

The poor, states Stirner, "only become free and property owners when they rebel, rise up." Your fortune, as pirates knew literally, is in your own hands. (Which, of course, doesn't necessarily mean as a result of individual selfishness for, as with pirate crews, willing associations are easily enough made.) And it is an advantage for you for it to be so. So one should treat the other not as the state decides or as capitalist economics decides or as Christian morality decides but as... "useful entities", useful, that is, to each other, to our ownness. In case this seems like treating each other with a lack of proper respect ask yourself how respectful it is to regard people as arbitrary subjects under state control, as

those who must be subservient and obey, or as those who require money in order to obtain property on pain of having nothing and starving to death if they have none. That's not very "respectful", is it? Stirner in his text talks of egoists as behaving egoistically "when you respect each other neither as holders nor as paupers or workers, but as a part of your capability, as 'useful entities'." This is to say, quite openly and honestly and without shame, that we make use of others as they are useful to us – and they do the same in return. This puts the emphasis on what is of use and what we can make use of and Stirner sees this as educational and self-actualising in that it is an opportunity to expand both and so increase our capabilities and our abilities to make use of others. This is a matter of increasing our independence and not relying on the deceptive and malicious convenience and dependency of the state. A Stirnerite moral epithet here is "If I don't concern myself with my affair, then I have to be content with what it pleases others to grant me." Indeed. Stirner and Diogenes are here as one in praise of self-sufficiency (autarkeia).

But, to quote Tina Turner, "What's love got to do with it?" Here, it is worth quoting Stirner at more length:

*"Am I perhaps to have no lively interest in the person of another, should his joys and his well-being not lie at my heart, should the enjoyment that I prepare for him not be more to me than other enjoyments of my own? On the contrary, I can sacrifice numberless enjoyments to him with joy, I can deny myself countless things to heighten his pleasure, and I can risk for him what would be dearest to me without him, my life, my welfare, my freedom. Indeed, it forms my pleasure and happiness to feast on his pleasure and happiness. But me, myself, I do not sacrifice to him, but rather remain an egoist and enjoy him. If I sacrifice to him everything I would keep without my love for him, that is very easy, and even*

*more commonplace in life than it seems to be; but it proves nothing more than that this one passion in me is more powerful than all the rest. Christianity also teaches to sacrifice all other passions to this one. But if I sacrifice others to one passion, I still do not, for this reason, sacrifice myself, and sacrifice nothing through which I truly am myself; I do not sacrifice my particular worth, my ownness. Where this nasty incident occurs, love looks no better than any other passion that I blindly obey. The ambitious person, who is swept away by ambition and remains deaf to every warning that a quiet moment engenders in him, has let this passion grow into a tyrant against which he gives up all power of breaking off: he has given up himself, because he cannot break off, and therefore cannot release himself from the passion: he is possessed.*

*I also love human beings, not just a few individuals, but every one. But I love them with the awareness of egoism; I love them because love makes me happy, I love because love is natural to me, it pleases me. I know no 'commandment of love.' I have fellow feeling with every feeling being, and their torment torments me, their refreshment refreshes me too; I can kill, not torture, them. In contrast, the high-minded, virtuous philistine prince Rudolph in *The Mysteries of Paris* plots the torture of the wicked, because they 'enrage' him. That fellow-feeling only proves that the feeling of those who feel is also mine, my property; in contrast to which the relentless practices of the 'righteous' person (for example, against the notary Ferrand) resembles the lack of feeling of that robber who cut off or stretched his prisoners' legs to the measure of his bedstead: Rudolph's bedstead, to whose measure he cut human beings, is the concept of the 'good.' The feeling for right, virtue, etc., makes one hard-hearted and intolerant. Rudolph doesn't feel as the notary feels, but contrarily feels that 'it serves the rascal right'; this is not fellow-feeling.*

*You love the human being, therefore you torture the individual human being, the egoist; your love of humanity is the tormenting of human beings.*

*If I see the beloved suffering, I suffer with him, and I find no rest until I've tried everything to comfort and cheer him; if I see him joyful, I too become joyful over his joy. It doesn't follow from this that the same thing causes suffering or joy in me, as that which brings about these effects in him, as any bodily pain sufficiently proves, since I don't feel it as he does; his tooth gives him pain, but his pain gives me pain.*

*But because I cannot bear the sorrowful crease on the beloved forehead, therefore, then for my sake, I kiss it away. If I didn't love this person, he could go right on creasing his forehead, that wouldn't trouble me; I'm only driving away my troubles.*

*Now, how does anyone or anything that I do not love, have a right to be loved by me? Is my love first or is his right first? Parents, relatives, fatherland, people, home town, etc., and finally fellow human beings in general ('brothers, brotherhood') claim to have a right to my love and lay claim to it without further ado. They look upon it as their property, and upon me, if I don't respect it, as a robber who deprives them of what is due to them and is theirs. I am supposed to love. If love is a commandment and a law, then I must be educated for it, trained in it, and if I violate it, punished. People will therefore exercise the strongest 'moral influence' possible on me, to bring me to love. And there's no doubt that one can titillate and seduce human beings to love as to other passions, for example, to hatred as well. Hatred runs through whole generations simply because the ancestors of one belonged to the Guelphs, those of the other to the Ghibellines.*

*But love is not a commandment, but rather, like each of my feelings, my property. Acquire, i.e., purchase, my property, and then I will give it up to you. I don't need to love a church, a people, a fatherland, a family, etc., that don't know how to acquire my love, and I set the purchase price of my love thoroughly to my pleasure."*

Love, in other words, is part of my property, my ownness, and, as such, is also something I give as it pleases me to do so or as it is useful to me so to do. As in so many other things, there can and should be no coercion of or for my love. It is something I give as a gift and not something to be forced out of me. Such love is neither blind nor crazy nor "romantic" nor "mystical". And, of course, it cannot be sacred either for then it might make of the beloved something sacred too. Instead:

*"My love is my own only when it consists altogether in a selfish and egoistic interest, and so the object of my love is actually my object or my property. I owe my property nothing and have no obligation to it, as little as I have an obligation to my eye; if I still tend it with the greatest care, I do so for my sake... For the egoist, nothing is so high that he would humble himself before it, nothing so independent that he would live for the love of it, nothing so sacred that he would sacrifice himself to it. The egoist's love wells up from selfishness, flows in a bed of selfishness, and empties back into selfishness... Only as one of my feelings do I cherish love, but as a power over me, as a divine power (Feuerbach), as a passion that I should not avoid, as a religious or moral duty, I despise it... In short, egoistic love, i.e., my love, is neither holy nor unholy, neither divine nor diabolical."*

But then again:



*"If earlier I said, I love the world, now I add as well: I don't love it, because I annihilate it, as I annihilate myself; I break it up. I don't limit myself to one feeling for human beings, but give free play to all of which I am capable. How should I not dare to express it in all its stridency? Yes, I use the world and human beings! In this way I can keep myself open to every impression without being torn away from myself by one of them. I can love, love with all my heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved for anything other than nourishment for my passion, on which it always refreshes itself anew. All my care for him counts only for the object of my love, only for him whom my love needs, only for him whom I 'ardently love.' How indifferent he would be to me without this, my love. I only feed my love with him, I use him only for this: I enjoy him."*

Therefore:

*"We have only one relationship to each other, that of usefulness, usability, advantage. We owe each other nothing, because what I seem to owe to you, I owe at most to myself. If I show you a cheerful expression in order to likewise cheer you up, then your cheerfulness matters to me, and my expression serves my wish; I do not show it to thousands of others, whom I have no intention of cheering up."*

All this leads us to the following piece of Stirnerite exposition:

*"Let us rather break with every hypocrisy of community and recognize that, if we are equal as human beings, we are simply not equal because we are not human beings. We are equal only in thoughts, only when 'we' are thought, not as we actually and bodily are. I am I, and you are I, but I am not this thought of I, but rather this I in which we are all equal is only my thought. I am human, and you are human, but 'human' is only a thought, a generality;*

*neither you nor I are speakable, we are unutterable, because only thoughts are speakable and exist in speaking.*

*Let's therefore not strive for community, but for one-sidedness. Let's not seek the broadest commune, "human society;" but rather let's seek in others only means and organs that we use as our property! As we don't see our equals in trees, in animals, so the assumption that others are our equals arises from a hypocrisy. No one is my equal but I consider him, equally with all other beings, as my property. In opposition to this, one tells me that I should be a human being among 'fellow human beings;' I should 'respect' the fellow human being in them. No one is for me a person to be respected, not even the fellow human being, but rather solely an object, like other beings, for which I have or don't have concern, an interesting or uninteresting object, a usable or unusable creature.*

*And if I can use him, I surely come to an understanding and reach an agreement with him, to strengthen my power through the agreement and to accomplish more through combined force than individual force could achieve. In this mutuality I see nothing at all beyond a multiplication of my strength, and I'll keep at it only so long as it is my multiplied strength. But so it is an association.*

*Neither a natural nor a spiritual tie holds the association together, and it is not a natural nor a spiritual alliance. Neither one blood, nor one faith (spirit), brings it about. In a natural alliance-like a family, a tribe, a nation, indeed, humanity-individuals only have the value of specimens of the same type of species; in a spiritual alliance-like a parish or a church-the individual only symbolizes a member of the same spirit; what you are as unique must in both cases be suppressed. You can assert yourself as unique only in the association, because the association doesn't possess you, you possess it or make it of use to you...*

*You bring all of your power, your ability, into the association, and assert yourself while in society you are employed with your labour power; in the former you live egoistically, in the latter humanly, i.e., religiously, as a 'member of this Lord's body'; to the society, you owe what you have, and are obligated to it, are possessed by 'social obligations'; you use the association, and give it up undutifully and unfaithfully when you don't see any more use for it. If the society is more than you, then to you it is above you; the association is only your tool or the sword with which you intensify and increase your natural force; the association is there for you and through you, while society, on the contrary, lays claim to you for itself and is still there without you; in short, society is sacred, the association your own; society consumes you, you consume the association."*

What does all of this mean? It means: "Actualise yourself!" - which is the slogan that Stirner claims stood over his time and which I echo should stand over ours. But there are shocking consequences of such a slogan and one such is that, after giving it, Stirner almost immediately claims that "The poor are to blame for the existence of the rich". But why? Because, presumably, if they actualised themselves there would be no rich. Whether there are rich or not, the rich always being vanishingly few, is always in the hands of the acquiescent (and vastly outnumbering) poor. Its just like the slaves and the masters: there are no slaves, and no masters, if the slaves refuse to be slaves and so give the masters no one who will be mastered.

Now Stirner was consciously writing in an age of revolutions. But it was not a revolution (a revolution being a thing which often, if not usually, fails completely – and that whether it succeeds or whether it doesn't) but INSURRECTION that he wanted. As he famously explains:

*"Revolution and insurrection should not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in a radical change of conditions, of the prevailing condition or status, the state or society, and is therefore a political or social act; the latter indeed has a transformation of conditions as its inevitable result, but doesn't start from it, but from the discontent of human beings with themselves; it is not an armed uprising, but a rising up of individuals, a getting up, without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The revolution is aimed at new arrangements, while the insurrection leads us to no longer let ourselves be arranged, but rather to arrange ourselves, and sets no radiant hopes on 'institutions.' It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established will collapse of itself; it is only a working of my way out of the established. If I leave the established, it is dead and falls into decay. Since now my aim is not the overthrow of the established order but my rising up above it, so my intention and action are not a political or social intention and action, but, since they are directed solely toward me and my ownness, an egoistic intention and action.*

*The revolution commands one to make arrangements; the insurrection demands that one stand or raise himself up... The insurrectionist strives to become constitutionless."*

Such comments become of political import when one, once again, recalls the commentary of Gabriel Kuhn on the pirates, particularly that commentary in which he berates them for not freeing the world from state control or, perhaps, ensuring that their way of life lasted a lot longer than it did. Was that ever the point of pirates, piracy or their own insurrection? I don't think it was and assert that it is a fundamental misunderstanding of them to imagine that it either was or should have been. Pirates were simply insurrectionists in Stirner's sense: they wanted to be "constitutionless"; they had no interest in "making arrangements". And this was a politics too, an egoistic, nihilistic anti-

politics of self-actualisation. It is even one Stirner suggests the Jesus I discussed in an earlier chapter shared. Here Jesus is not a revolutionary (bearing in mind his recent distinctions) but an insurrectionist. Jesus didn't want to reform the state: he wanted people to reform (better: actualise) themselves. As a former PhD student on the subject of the historical Jesus, I concur with this assessment - and that Jesus was consciously not a political revolutionary like others of his time and place were is a truism of modern historical knowledge of Jesus. Jesus, then, did not want to fight the state or its authorities: he largely just ignored them because he was on his own chosen trajectory: he was self-actualised. (Sadly, Christianity and Christians largely did not follow his lead while, scandalously, using a title they had given him for their subsequent religion.)

Insurrection here, in Stirner's terms, brings us to anarchy for he describes it as "arranging ourselves" or "working our way out of being established". Insurrection is getting others out of your hair or disentangling yourself from their, but not your, crap. It is about making things your property and making things enjoyable for you. As an insurrectionist, whether a pirate or not, it is your satisfaction which decides your relationship to human beings. Thus:

*"I no longer humble myself before any power and I realize that all powers are only my power, which I have to conquer at once when they threaten to become a power against or over me; each of them must only be one of my means to assert myself, as a hunting dog is our power against game, but we kill it if it attacks us ourselves. So I reduce all powers that dominate me to serving me. The idols exist through me; I need only stop creating them anew, then they no longer are; 'higher powers' only exist because I raise them up and lower myself.*

*So my relationship to the world is this: I no longer do anything for it 'for God's sake;' I do nothing 'for humanity's sake;' but what I do, I do 'for my sake.' Thus, the world alone satisfies me, whereas it is characteristic of the religious standpoint, in which I also include the moral and the humane, that everything from it remains a pious wish (pium desiderium), a hereafter, something unattained. Thus, the universal salvation of humanity, the moral world of universal love, eternal peace, the cessation of egoism, etc. 'Nothing in this world is perfect.' With this miserable saying, the good separate from it and take refuge in their chamber with God, or in their proud 'self-consciousness.' But we remain in this 'imperfect' world, because even so we can use it for our self-enjoyment.*

*My intercourse with the world consists in this, that I enjoy it, and so consume it for my self-enjoyment. Intercourse is the enjoyment of the world, and belongs to my self-enjoyment."*

Enjoyment of life, we find out in the subsequent section of *The Unique and Its Property*, "is using life up". And what else did pirates, hard drinking, hard gambling, hard sailing, pirates do but that? This I call an anti-politics:

*"From now on the question is not how a person can gain life, but how he can squander, can enjoy it; or not how he is to produce the true I in himself, but how he is to dissolve himself, to live his life to the full."*

Why? For:

*"A human being is 'called' to nothing, and has no 'mission;' no 'purpose;' no more than a plant or a beast has a 'calling.' The flower doesn't follow the calling to complete itself, but applies all its forces to enjoy and consume the world as best it can, i.e., it sucks in as much*

*of the earth's juices, as much of the ether's air, as much of the sun's light, as it can get and accommodate. The bird doesn't live up to any calling, but it uses its forces as much as possible: it catches bugs and sings to its heart's delight. But the forces of the flower and the bird are small compared to those of a human being, and a human being who uses his forces will intervene in the world much more powerfully than a flower or a beast. He has no calling, but he has forces that manifest themselves where they are, because their being consists solely in their manifestation and can no more remain idle than life, which, if it 'stood still' for even a second, would no longer be life. Now, one could call out to human beings: 'use your force.' But the meaning would be put into this imperative that it is the mission of the human being to use his force. It's not so. Rather, everyone actually uses his force without first looking at this as his calling; at every moment everyone uses as much force as he possesses. One is likely to say of a defeated person, he should have exerted his forces more; except one forgets that if, at the moment of succumbing, he had had the strength to exert his forces (e.g., bodily forces), he would not have failed to do it; even if it was only the discouragement of a minute, this was still a minute-long-lack of force. Forces may certainly be sharpened and multiplied, particularly by hostile resistance or friendly assistance; but where their use is missing, there you can also be sure of their absence. One can strike fire from a stone, but without the striking none comes out; in the same way, the human being also requires 'prods.'"*

Life here is a matter of "using it up" and "applying its forces". It is not about obeying callings or dogmas or purposes. It is not about "being something" – as if there were something to be! Such things are more ghosts to be exorcised, imagines Stirner. Indeed:

*"No sheep, no dog, makes the effort to become a 'proper sheep, a proper dog'; no beast's essence appears to it as a task, as a concept that it has to realize. It realizes itself by*

*enjoying itself, dispersing itself, dying. It doesn't ask to be or become anything other than what it is."*

But not the human. The human gets sold oh so many fictions, fictions it finds hard to resist within social systems constructed to enable, enforce and maintain them. All of this, of course, is based on the great fiction "Reason". Reason, says Stirner, "is a book full of laws which are all passed against egoism":

*"History up to now has been the history of the intellectual or spiritual human being. After the period of sensuality, history in the strict sense begins, i.e., the period of intellectuality, spirituality, non-sensuality, supernaturalism, nonsense. The human being now begins to want to be and become something. What? Good, beautiful, true; more precisely, moral, pious, agreeable, etc. He wants to make a 'proper human being;' 'something proper;' of himself. The human is his goal, his should, his destiny, calling, task, his ideal: he is to himself a future, an other-worldly being. And what makes him a 'proper guy? Being true, being good, being moral, and the like. Now he looks askance at anyone who doesn't recognize the same 'what;' seek the same morality, have the same faith; he chases away the 'separatists, heretics, sects;' etc."*

Western Morality, Humanity, Liberalism, Equality: all constructed confections arrived at in order to tell the human being what to be, how to behave, how to relate, what to live for, what values to have, etc. Just one thing stands in their way: the actualised human being, the individual human self:



*"Efforts to 'mould' all human beings into moral, rational, pious, human, etc. 'essences;' i.e., training, have been in vogue from time immemorial. They are shipwrecked on the indomitable sense of self, on own nature, on egoism."*

Shipwrecked. How apt! Shall we then decide our lives, squander our lives, for ourselves? Shall this be... an (our) anti-politics?

"What a human being is, he makes out of things; 'As you look at the world, so it looks back at you'" says Stirner, sagely (in a thought not unlike Nietzsche's reflection on abysses). But then he adds:

*"A person looks at things just right when he makes of them what he will (by things here objects in general are understood, like God, our fellow human beings, a sweetheart, a book, a beast, etc.). And therefore the things and the perception of them are not first, but I am, my will is. A person wills to bring thoughts out of things, wills to discover reason in the world, wills to have sacredness in it; therefore, he shall find them. 'Seek and ye shall find.' What I want to seek, I determine:...*

*I choose for myself what is my purpose, and in choosing I show myself capricious. This is linked to the realization that every judgment which I pass upon an object is the creation of my will, and in turn this realization leads me to not lose myself in the creation, the judgment, but to remain the creator, the one judging, who is always creating anew. All attributes of objects are my statements, my judgments, my creations. If they want to break loose from me and be something for themselves, or even try to impose on me, then I have nothing better to do than to take them back into their nothing, into me the creator. God, Christ, trinity, morality, the good, etc., are such creations, of which I have to not only allow*

*myself to say that they are truths, but also that they are delusions. As I once willed and decreed their existence, so I also want to be free to will their non-existence; I must not let them outgrow me, I must not have the weakness to let them become something 'absolute;' so that they would be made eternal and withdrawn from my power and decision. With this I fall for the stability principle, the original life-principle of religion, which concerns itself with creating 'inviolable sanctuaries;' 'eternal truths;' in short, something 'sacred;' and taking away from you what is yours."*

This seems to me to be fine discourse on constructionism, a belief many people don't like because they hate to imagine that the world, and how we understand it, is so much to do with us (that is, is egoistic) and is not so much to do with something over and against us (like God), which nevertheless of course exists and has effects, which is telling us how to think about it and relate to it. But Stirner is not afraid of such thought and towards the end of his book mentions something which very much sounds, in modern parlance, like writer and magician Alan Moore's concept of "Ideaspace":

*"Nothing at all is justified by being. The imaginary thing is as much as the non-imaginary thing; the stone on the street is, and my image of it also is. The two are only in different spaces, the former in airy space, the latter in my head; because I am space like the street."*

"What is real?" we often hear people asking and Stirner and Moore both agree that its not simply "that which is physically material" (which is a modern dogma in some places). Moore, in some places, intimates that words are simply magic, conjurings, things with which to bring forth worlds. Here Stirner says:

*"There's not even one truth, not right, not freedom, not humanity, etc., which would endure before me and to which I would submit. They are words, nothing but words, as to the Christian all things are nothing but 'vain things.' In words and truths (every word is a truth, as Hegel asserts that one can tell no lies) there is no salvation for me, as little as there is for Christians in things and vanities. As the wealth of this world doesn't make me happy, so also its truths don't. It is now no longer Satan, but the spirit, that plays the temptation story; and it doesn't seduce with the things of this world, but with its thoughts, with the 'glory of the idea.'"*

Here Stirner tells a tale similar to one I have told before that "everything is a fiction" and a lot of it, if not all of it as a matter of its purpose and function, is there to beguile you into believing it. But Stirner gives us a stern warning about this:

*"If there is even just one truth to which the human being must devote his life and his powers, because he is a human being, then he is subjected to a rule, domination, law; he is a serf. The human being, humanity, freedom, etc., are supposed to be such truths."*

So whilst all might be fiction, even, of course, including this, it would be a mistake to live by it. Hierarchy, for example, Stirner claims will last for exactly as long as people "believe in, think about, or even criticise" it. As long as we have certain values and believe in certain principles then those things, for us, are active and valid things. The truth, says Stirner slightly further on, attempting to answer Pilate's question from John's Gospel, "is the Lord". If you are seeking "the truth" then you are seeking the Lord and you want a saviour. (Richard Dawkins, false atheist, please take note!) Why is this important? Because:

*"As long as you believe in the truth, you do not believe in yourself, and you are a servant, a religious person. You alone are the truth, or rather, you are more than the truth, which is nothing at all before you."*

In short, and as a Stirnerite refrain, you are to make thoughts and conceptions, appearances of things, things that are your property, things enjoyable for, and palatable to, yourself. I think this means that things only mean anything in relation to concrete human beings with their ownness and their interests and so I understand why Stirner also says that "So you are their truth, or it is the nothing that you are for them and in which they dissolve, their truth is their nothingness." All is there for consumption; all is there to be made of use: but none of it is arbitrating for us and especially not in terms of "the idea". Thus, Stirner reflects:

*"People have always reckoned that they must give me a purpose that lies outside myself, so that finally they demanded that I should call upon the human because I am a human. This is the Christian magic circle. Fichte's I is also the same essence outside me, because I is everyone, and, if only this I has rights, then it is 'the I;' I am not it. But I am not one I alongside other Is, but the sole I: I am unique. Therefore my needs are unique, my actions, in short, everything about me is unique. And it's only as this unique I that I take everything as mine to own, as I am active and develop myself only as this. I don't develop human beings, nor as a human being, but as I, I develop myself. This is the sense of the unique."*

We are at the end of Stirner's tale and I would end my retelling of it with Stirner's own finale. It is my suggestion that his egoism is fairly well exemplified in the life of the pirates and so stands as an example of a politics but ultimately whether that's true or not will be

up to you to decide. But it is as well to remember, in closing this chapter, what such a politics of pirates and egoists would be:

*"They say of God, 'Names name you not.' This is true of me: no concept expresses me, nothing that is said to be my essence exhausts me; they are only names. They also say of God that he is perfect and has no calling to strive for perfection. This too is true of me alone.*

*I am owner of my power, and I am so when I know myself as unique. In the unique the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born. Every higher essence over me, be it God, be it the human being, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and only pales before the sun of this awareness. If I base my affair on myself, the unique, then it stands on the transient, the mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: I have based my affair on nothing."*

## **Pirates: Violence, Love and *Joie de Vivre* in Watery Wastelands**

Writing about pirates of the Golden Age (approximately 1690-1725), one of the foremost scholars of piracy, Marcus Rediker, writes in his book *Villains of All Nations*:

*"The sailor who embraced the Jolly Roger after 1716 came from a potent experience of life and labor in a wooden world. The sailor's workplace, the deep-sea sailing ship, was something of a factory in those days, a place where 'hands'—those who owned no property and who therefore sold their labor for a money wage—cooperated to make the machine go. Sailing these small, brittle wooden vessels over the forbidding oceans of the globe, the seaman took part in a profoundly collective work experience, one that required carefully synchronized cooperation with other maritime workers for the sake of survival. Facing a ship captain of almost unlimited disciplinary power and an ever readiness to use the cat-o'-nine-tails, the sailor developed an array of resistances against such concentrated authority that featured desertion, work stoppages, mutinies, and strikes. Indeed, the sailor would invent the strike during a wage dispute in London in 1768 when he and his mates went from ship to ship, striking—lowering—the sails in an effort to make merchants grant their demands. Facing such natural and man-made dangers, which included a chronic scarcity of food and drink and a galling system of hierarchy and privilege, the sailor learned the importance of equality: his painfully acquired experience told him that a fair distribution of risks would improve everyone's chances for survival. Separated from loved ones and the rest of society for extended periods, the sailor developed a distinctive work culture with its own language, songs, rituals, and sense of brotherhood. Its core values were collectivism, anti-authoritarianism, and egalitarianism, all of which were summarized in the sentence frequently uttered by rebellious sailors: 'they were one & all resolved to stand by one another.' All of these cultural traits flowed from the work experience, and all would*

*influence both the decision to turn pirate and how pirates would conduct themselves thereafter..."*

I have written about pirates before in my book *Black Flag* which, perhaps controversially for some, took pirates as an example of anarchy in practice. In my mind there was not anything particularly utopian about this (not believing anarchy to be a utopian thing, in practice, itself) nor was there any need for it to be. I simply asked myself the question "What would anarchy really look like if it happened in the real world?" and "pirates" came up as a realistic answer. Unfortunately for all the people who sit chatting with (or pontificating to) their chosen "progressive" audience, "anarchy" is never going to be perfectly realised or appear in some pure and universal form because... its already happening and you are living in it. What you see around you is what we are making of the situation of the real anarchy (i.e. the Wasteland) that is simple existence as we know it. Anarchy, I have become convinced, is not a state of affairs people deliberately make, a forced political structure of the world, and, in fact, it continually escapes ever being so made. It then exists only in the direct action of living for yourselves and determining not to be controlled or constrained by others in any non-voluntary or non-cooperative way. Anarchy is not "politics"; its anti-politics.

So why pick out pirates? Because, as Stephen Snelders writes in his book, which we shall be following for a while, *The Devil's Anarchy*, the "most fundamental" characteristic of pirates, broadly described, was "their defiance and refusal to accommodate to the social and political relationships of hierarchical society." The description "pirates" here includes not only the true, acting for themselves, pirates of the aforementioned "Golden Age" but also their Atlantic precursors sometimes called buccaneers, freebooters or privateers as well. These were more properly "state-licenced pirates" in that they acted for countries or

colonial powers as freelancers; they weren't (although some would later become) true pirates. By "pirates" I mean a body of men (and it was almost uniformly just men) who formed their own crews, acted according to their own articles of association and wills, and lived *for themselves* as outcasts from, and rebels against, wider society. This is important because, as Peter Lamborn Wilson highlights in the case of Vietnamese boat people slaughtered by local Thai "pirates" in the early 1980s, whether you are actually "a pirate" or not is an ethically articulated thing. (Hence Wilson later calls these Thai aggressors "Sea-going muggers who prey on the poor, and murder them as well".) A pirate is not just "anyone in a boat who goes out stealing and killing". At least, as part of my anarchist discussion it's not. Just as some Marxist historians have refused to call pirates "social bandits" because they only acted for themselves rather than the wider population, so, here, "pirate", as I use the term, means something in particular. Let's explore together what that is.

The pirates I will mainly focus on were those of the Golden Age who sailed the North, and occasionally the South, Atlantic and who had "lairs" on the borders of this vast, watery expanse. There were other pirates at this time – notably in the Madagascar where it was mooted a pirate Utopia called "Libertalia" actually existed – but they shall remain mostly beyond our scope here. We are then talking about figures like Calico Jack, Blackbeard, Black Bart (Bartholomew) Roberts and the like. These pirates, their comrades in other ships and their various crews, almost certainly never topped 5,000 men in total during the whole of the Golden Age. Most were former seamen who had escaped the clutches of their former employers in one way or another. It is posited by Snelders (and also by Rediker) that these men as a whole formed a loose but genuine brotherhood and tradition based on past common experiences and responses to it which led them to take up arms (literally) together in their own cause. We may think of them usefully, in the



context of this part of my book, as wanderers in a watery wasteland who are attempting to “brave its cruelties” on their own terms.

Already the claim has been made above that pirates of this vintage refused hierarchy. Rediker talks about their qualities as being collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism. Yet the title of Snelders’ book I am going to follow for a while now is *The Devil’s Anarchy*. How come? Let us begin with symbols. It is in this time period when pirates began to fly the flag that would become known as “the Jolly Roger”. There is no canonical and indisputable history of its invention and so original meaning. Neither, in fact, is there a standard version of the flag which, although being black in common, could have a differing array of symbols upon it. That it had symbols upon it, of course, speaks to them having some meaning and so being intended to communicate something to those who saw it gaining upon them or coming over the horizon. Consequently, Marcus Rediker writes in his book *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*:

*“The most common symbol was the human skull, or ‘death’s head;’ sometimes isolated but more frequently the most prominent feature of an entire skeleton. Other recurring items were a weapon – cutlass, sword, or dart - and an hour glass. The flag was intended to terrify the pirates’ prey, but its triad of interlocking symbols - death, violence, limited time - simultaneously pointed to meaningful parts of the seaman’s experience and eloquently bespoke the pirates’ own consciousness of themselves as preyed upon in turn . . . as pirates - and some believed, only as pirates - these men were able to fight back beneath the somber colours of ‘King Death’ against those . . . who waved banners of authority.”*

But that this flag, whatever its individual depiction of symbols of death, violence and limited time, was called *The Jolly Roger* is also significant. The most convincing reason for

this, in my view, is the theory that it plays on a historical nickname for the Devil current at that time – “Old Roger”. That a flag *named after the Devil* should become the predominant pirate flag tells us things about pirate mentality. I accept Rediker’s assertion that the flag was meant to terrify those who saw it absolutely. But that it was a flag named after the Devil, in a time of Christian orthodoxy, was equally supposed to as well. This was an act of rebellion against Christianised public society much as Peter Lamborn Wilson has suggested (see his *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegadoes*) that some European pirates in North Africa converted to Islam. Thus, as Snelders puts it:

*“The Old, or Jolly, Roger points us to older, almost atavistic strains in our Christian culture. The flag invokes a world not unlike that of Paradise Lost, where Satan leads a rebellion against Christian hierarchy. Ranters’ Bay (in Madagascar) as the location for a pirate settlement? Milton puts the Ranter phrase, ‘Heaven and Hell are only states of mind;’ in the mouth of Satan himself, and there were likely some Ranters among Morgan’s buccaneers. Furthermore, the Admiral had a witch as adviser - witches being, as everybody knew, in close communion with the Devil. (The infamous witch hunts in Salem took place in 1692)... Sailing for Old Roger was effectively choosing for the Devil against God, a symbolic break with hierarchical society... Unconsciously it was a turn to an older, pre-Christian religion, the religion of nomads and hunters.”*

The brotherhood of the Jolly Roger was, consequently, one consciously against the polity of the day, the polity on which the pirates had been brought up in Christianised European colonial nation states in the case of the vast majority. This polity seems, most importantly, to have been symbolised in and through an overarching authoritarian violence which was uniquely prevalent in the closed environment of the ship at sea. (Well it wasn’t closed exactly. You could always jump overboard.) Marcus Rediker devotes an entire chapter of

*Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* to exactly this subject to demonstrate how, even from the cases which came to judgment and have some surviving documentation, life at sea for a simple crewman was nothing short of violently brutal with harsh physical punishments a regularised occurrence. Rediker likens it to a sea-borne factory before actual factories even really existed:

*"any worker who came from a workshop, a farm, or an estate to the ship entered not only one of the great technological wonders of the day but a new set of productive relations as well. The seaman was confined within a spatially limited laboring environment, forced to cultivate regular habits and keep regular hours, and placed in cooperative relationships with both other workers and the supervisors of his labor. In all of these ways, the seaman's experience foreshadowed that of the factory worker during the Industrial Revolution."*

Rediker goes on to describe the context of this as "disciplinary paternalism" and often a merchant or military ship's captain was little short of a tyrant. According to the law of the time, the captain was like a parent to children or a master to an apprentice with "absolute authority" over all aboard his vessel. This authority was fundamentally backed up by the legal and social system of relations such that commentators of the time could call the captain "a King at Sea". Consequently, captains issued orders and everyone else followed them. Or else. The array of punishments, beatings and altercations Rediker sets out in chapter five of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* is eye-watering to say the least and the fact is men died for displeasing their captain or questioning his orders whilst others were merely permanently disabled or tortured. Thus one remark of the time which Rediker notes:

*"There is no justice or injustice on board ship, my lad. There are only two things: duty and mutiny—mind that. All that you are ordered to do is duty. All that you refuse to do is mutiny."*

The ship, Rediker thus points out, was an absolutely "totalitarian environment" that ran on the basis of institutionalised violence in which people lost limbs, eyes, ears and lives as a result of actual or perceived disobedience or inability to perform duties adequately. Rediker makes the point, in fact, that physical intimidation was a regular tactic used by those in authority on the ship to "motivate" the crew to the performance of their already difficult duties on an ocean in what could sometimes be almost intolerable weather. "Calculated viciousness," says Rediker, "was often a foundation of authority (as part of) a larger economy of discipline." He even suggests murder "was clearly part of the social relations of work at sea" and this is not surprising when accountability under such conditions would have been hard to prosecute. Literally anyone could simply disappear overboard and no one would ever find out why. Any cover story could be cooked up with little chance of serious investigation. Consequently, as Rediker tells the story in his extraordinary chapter, there developed a "them and us" mentality between those with authority and those without. The former used violence and aggression (understood as discipline) against men they perceived as lazy and feckless whilst the crew regarded the officers as cruel overseers who made full use of the power society had given them. Clearly there seems to be something of class in this as well. As a result:

*"The physical environment of the ship, providing an almost infinite assortment of tools and work-related items that could be used as weapons, was the essential context for the negotiation of authority. Resort to handspikes, boards, hogshhead staves, sticks, ropes, cables, marking irons, braces, hooks, adzes, axes, tar brushes, broomsticks, pitch mops, oars,*

*harpoons, cutlasses, knives, or pistols made the possibility and reality of armed struggle ever-present."*

What this created, so Rediker informs us, was a need for defences organised by the men below decks in order to protect themselves from even the normal and regularised usage of violence as a consequence of authority. It is in this connection he talks of the crew of merchant and naval ships as those who developed feelings for collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism. But we can also look backwards at this from the angle of the pirates, most often men who had originally gone to sea as crew aboard merchant or naval ships, within this system of authority by violence, and had to survive it. Snelders, in his chapter on "the politics of piracy", tells us that:

*"the first principle of the politics of piracy under the Jolly Roger (was) the refusal to accept non-functional authority. In general, pirate captains only had a recognized authority when their crew were fighting and chasing prey, apart from whatever influence they could (or could not) exert on the decision-making process by the strength of their personalities (and their skilled weapons play). The importance of their influence was not automatically guaranteed, as was the case for ship's captains in normal, hierarchical society. The same view held for the pirates of the Golden Age - one did not become a pirate, with all its attendant risks, to exchange one lord for another."*

Pirates, then, first and foremost, were those who had made the decision to dispense with bosses permanently. Pirate captains were functional figures chosen by the ship's company because, one hoped, they were actually good at the job of organising sailing – especially when the task at hand was running down other ships and taking what they had, possibly whilst under fire, or else escaping from those sent after them. An ideal pirate captain was

thus the one best placed to functionally lead and prosecute the pirates' means of survival. Outside of this function, however, his authority diminished accordingly and he could be removed by the same crew that had appointed him at any time. This, in turn, informs us that in the change of conditions from merchant or naval ship to pirate ship the situation of power and authority had changed too. No longer is there a hierarchy of tyrants over oppressed crew. Now power lies in the community itself (not, in fact, unlike it did in various land-based revolutionary polities, such as that of the Diggers or the Ranters, by the middle of the seventeenth century). This leads us to consider the conditions under which men became pirates in the first place, namely the articles of association they composed by which they articulated their brotherhood. Stephen Snelders utilises the articles of the Welsh pirate Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart) for this purpose and I shall follow him in setting out his articles below:

I . Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment; has equal Title to the fresh Provisions, or strong Liquor, at any Time seized, and may use them at Pleasure, unless a Scarcity make it necessary, for the Good of all, to vote a Retrenchment.

II. Every Man to be called fairly in Turn, by List, on board Prizes, because (over and above their proper share) they were on Occasions allowed a Shift of Clothes; But if they defrauded the Company to the Value of a Dollar . . . MAROONING was their Punishment.

III. No Person to Game at Cards or Dice for Money. [An activity that was liable to cause dissension.]

IV. The Lights & Candles to be put out at eight o'Clock at Night. If any of the Crew, after that Hour, still remained inclined for Drinking, they were to do it on the open Deck.

V. To Keep their Piece, Pistols, & Cutlass clean, & fit for Service.

VI. No Boy or Woman to be allow'd amongst them. If any Man were found seducing any of the latter Sex, and carried her to Sea, he was to suffer Death.

VII. To desert the ship, or their quarters in battle, was punished with Death or Marooning.

VIII. No striking one another on Board, but every Man's Quarrels to be ended on Shore, at Sword and Pistol Thus: The Quarter-Master of the Ship, when the Parties will not come to any Reconciliation, accompanies them on Shore with what assistance he thinks proper, & turns the Disputants Back to Back, at so many Paces Distance. At the Word of Command, they turn and fire immediately, (or else the Piece is knocked out of their Hands). If both miss, they come to their Cutlasses, and then he is declared Victor who draws the first Blood.

IX. No Man to talk of breaking up their Way of Living, till each had shared 1000 pounds. If in order to this, any Man should lose a Limb, or become a Cripple in their Service, he was to have 800 Dollars, out of the public Stock, and for lesser Hurts, proportionably.

X. The Captain and Quarter-Master to receive two Shares of a Prize; the Master, Boatswain, & gunner, one Share and a half and other Officers, [mates, the carpenter, the surgeon] , one and a Quarter.

XI. The Musicians to have Rest on the Sabbath Day, but the other six Days & Nights, none without special Favor.

Here we can see several differences immediately as compared with former authoritarian conditions. One way non-pirate captains controlled or punished their crew, for example, was by denying them victuals. On a pirate ship, given the example of Black Bart's articles of association here which informed observers consider representative, each and every pirate had equal right of access to food, drink and liquor – unless it was necessary for the good of all to restrict rations generally. Prizes (from their captured booty) were awarded in order but stealing from the general company was an offence punishable by “marooning” – being left on an island by yourself – being expelled from the crew to your vast disadvantage, in other words. Games of chance were prohibited to prevent arguments whilst those who wanted to drink into the night were to do so without disturbing others generally. Women and children were forbidden (more on this shortly) whilst the crew were expected to have themselves ready for battle at all times. Desertion during a battle, when your crewmates needed you most, also accrued a punishment of death or marooning. There was a formal dispute procedure overseen by the Quartermaster, a figure as important as the captain often representative of the crew, who oversaw routine tasks on board ship and arbitrated the disputes. Crewmen were expected to make their contribution to the polity before thinking of leaving again. A primitive form of social security ensured they would be compensated for injuries accrued as part of the company and its actions. Those with particular functions on board received extra shares of plunder and while the musicians on board could rest on Sundays, they were expected to play every other day unless they were given permission not to. Such is the polity of Jolly Roger and we can see it is focused on the community of free men.

Commenting on these articles, Snelders says:



*"Articles from other pirate crews mentioned by Johnson show pretty much the same picture. In 1721, Lowther's pirates agreed that the use of a weapon against comrades on board the ship or any prize, cowardice in battle, not delivering plunder to the quartermaster for general distribution, gambling for money, or defrauding a comrade, would be punished as 'the Captain and Majority shall think fit.' In the distribution of the plunder the captain got two shares, the master one and a half, and other officers one and a quarter. For the loss of a limb one was given 150 pounds, 'and [can] remain with the Company as long as he shall think fit.' Lowther's crew also agreed to give 'good Quarters' when called for by their prizes. The men of John Phillips agreed in 1723 to give one and a half shares of the plunder to the captain and one and a quarter shares to other officers. Deserters were to be punished by marooning; theft from comrades by marooning or death; physical attacks against comrades by forty lashes on the bare back; smoking or lighting a candle in the hold without a cap or a lantern by forty lashes; poor maintenance of weapons by the loss of a share and other punishment 'as the Captain and Majority shall think fit'; and meddling with a woman without her consent by death. Loss of a joint or a limb was recompensed with between 400 and 800 pieces-of-eight."*

Whether we think these articles of association "ideal" or not, they are clearly not authoritarian and hierarchical paternalism carried out in a disciplinary fashion and imposed on any who set foot on board the ship. Pirates, as one can see from even the brief introduction to them I have given here, were hard men schooled in, by and through violence and authoritarian oppression (which some did not survive) and this was nothing new to them. Violence was their business and also the means by which business was routinely done. Seen against this background, and keeping in mind Rediker's assertion that they developed proclivities for collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism, we can see these articles come as an almost revolutionary change of tack, to use a sailing

metaphor. Most importantly, we must recall that these weren't rules being imposed on anybody for pirates became pirates by choice and were free to leave, in the main, if they had done their bit for the crew (which was really the only way to prove your worth and gain a positive reputation).

Pirate crews were collectives in every sense and not joining in was viewed with utmost suspicion, not least because to sail a ship successfully was a dangerous business which required working together with absolute trust in those you sailed with. The pirate crew, according to Snelders, was governed by social interactions based on customs (their articles) and "strength of personality" – a proactive enthusiasm for the cause and the company. He calls pirate crews "an anarchic organisation of violent men" and this seems fair in the light of the research I have done. If you research actual pirates we can verify as real, you find that their lives were like fireworks, bright and violent but short. They were those who maximised their liberty together because they valued it most knowing that it could not last for long in a policed and incarcerating world.

Pirates thus lived and operated in a world of violence and negotiating and mitigating said violence was all of a piece with their existence. As a brotherhood of men that forged and maintained a tradition, they organised themselves in such ways as violence among them was limited and controlled. Their communities were about maximising personal and social liberty amongst them and limiting the violence, as an aspect of power and authority, that could be used against them from those outside or beyond them. One could label this "Utopian" but it was really just pragmatism given their lifestyle and options. They were not going to get very far carrying on as was the case on the hierarchical ships they had left behind. They needed a new set of relationships to experience a new and liberating kind of life and so they invented them for themselves.

Snelders tells us, in something that explains the “jolly” that goes along with “Old Roger”, that pirates attempted to live the life of an eternal festival. (It occurs to me that this is where the pirate historian and anarchist Peter Lamborn Wilson, i.e. Hakim Bey, got his idea of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” from.) “The Devil’s Anarchy” was then a life opposed to the ways of the Christianised, authoritarian and civilised world that was all about the joys of working together for each other and carousing whilst doing it. Their symbology may have been “death, violence and the fleeting passage of time” but you will have noted that Black Bart’s articles also contained – as the first stipulation! – that every single crew member was entitled to all the liquor he could drink! Piracy, as a mentality and chosen lifestyle, was about freedom from authority and becoming your own lord not just some of the time but ALL of the time. For the pirate, as their symbols showed, the sense was that time, and so life, was passing away all of the time. So it is hardly surprising that “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” was largely how they thought. Life was thus there to be enjoyed in each moment – because each was very aware that none of them knew precisely how much of it they had left. The violence pirates had to live with, of course, was not only in their pasts as lower members of wooden authoritarian hierarchies. Actual navies were looking to kill them and any regular engagement might take someone’s life. In the last ten years of the Golden Age around 10% of pirates were executed – and that doesn’t include the many others killed in engagement at sea (such as the aforementioned Black Bart, for example). Reading the histories of known pirates of the Golden Age does not regale one with tales of those who enjoyed long life and who died of old age. A pirate’s life could be short, just 3 or 4 years – and so they attempted to make it sweet. Snelders consequently reports this speech given to Black Bart (statistically the most successful pirate of the Golden Age but also one who was killed for being a pirate) which gives us a sense of the pirate mentality:

*"Damn to him who ever lived to wear a Halter. . . . In an honest Service, says he, there is thin Commons, low Wages, and hard Labour; in this [piracy], Plenty and Satiety, Pleasure and Care, Liberty and Power; and who would not balance Creditors on this Side, when all the Hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour Look or two at choking. No, a merry Life and a short one, shall be my Motto."*

Pirates were men who desired, and so chose, to live and fight for the enjoyment of physical pleasures (liquor and music are included in Black Bart's articles) and we should be very much aware that this was not the least of their motivations. Snelders then comments on this that:

*"Whether instinctively or consciously, the pirates embraced a counterculture contradictory to the Protestant ethic that was triumphing in England, emphasizing the religious duty of working hard and avoiding the sins of idleness and over-indulgence in pleasures of the flesh. The ethic of Old Roger, which had been given public expression in the English Revolution by the Ranters, was the exact opposite of repressive Protestantism and, paradoxically, was more akin to the libertinism of aristocratic cavaliers - with the added element of egalitarianism."*

It has already been stated that pirates were men living in, and made by, a violent world. This is true. As a consequence, it must absolutely be noted that pirates were themselves men of violence rather than pacifists or principled men of non-violence. Such assertions would themselves be utterly ridiculous. Pirates shot, stabbed, cut, blew up, fired cannons at and generally killed or tortured people (and more especially people in charge!) if they needed to – and sometimes only if they wanted to. Their crews contained some seeming sadists who enjoyed meting out pain and we must imagine that at least some, if not many,

had absolutely no love either for those they preyed upon (merchant vessels including their authoritarian officers) or those who came after them (navies in the service of governments). Revenge is noted in the literature as a prevalent pirate motivation. The pirateologist David Cordingly, in his book *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and Reality of Life Among the Pirates*, puts it like this:

*"Although some of the pirate violence reported by colonial governors was the work of sadists and men looking for kicks to relieve the boredom of their existence, this was not always the case. Many pirate crews only resorted to torture and murder to achieve specific ends. Violence was most commonly used to enable the pirates to find out as quickly as possible where the captain, the crew, and any passengers on board had hidden their valuables; it was also used deliberately to create a terrifying image. As word spread of pirate atrocities, it was hoped that future victims would surrender without a fight. Another motive behind many of the reported cruelties was revenge. Pirates were quick to avenge any attempt to curb their activities, and many atrocities were revenge attacks on islands or the ships of nations which had imprisoned or hanged pirates in the recent past."*

Being guided by this assessment, pirate violence was functional and purposive rather than systemic or indiscriminate. More than one commentator suggests that, whilst pirates would not shy away from violence, they were more than happy if they could scare their targets into simple surrender. This was much better all round since then no member of the crew would be a casualty of conflict. But this required the reality of actual pirate violence to pull off. Potential prey had to believe absolutely that they were in physical danger of attack or death for this to work. The only way for that reality to be convincing was if it actually was. One consequence of this was that those ships who attempted to resist pirates – either by attempting to flee or deploying their own weaponry – were more

harshly treated. Cordingly tells us in the same source that “Ships’ captains who hid or refused to reveal the whereabouts of valuables could expect no mercy.” The message here is clear: give us what we want and things will go better for everyone. “No mercy” could and did include forms of torture – of which the ship, pirate and non-pirate, had developed many forms from beating with whips, ropes or cords to stretching limbs until they popped. A favourite appears to have been burning matches between fingers or toes, potentially until the recalcitrant victim burned alive rather than giving up his secrets. Pirates were not pussy cats. No one at sea was.

But here we must also make the point, one of the most important to remember about pirates and piracy generally, that *no two pirates, or pirate ships, were the same*. It is often a grave and self-deceiving error to generalise about pirates and doing so always mischaracterises people who were fundamentally defined by their independence. What one pirate crew did need not be what another one did. There are as many, if not more, cases of pirates taking what they needed and letting people go unharmed as there are of unhinged massacres or prolonged and unnecessary tortures. One needs to remember that pirates were practical people who had functions to fulfil in order to live as they chose to. Prolonging their lives of piracy was the aim on which all their actions focused. This might sometimes require extreme violence but surely not every time. Pirates were not the merchant or naval captains under whom they had nearly uniformly served and their violence was much more sparing and functional (rather than systemic) as a result. A perfect example here is marooning, a form of violence in which men were left on often uninhabited islands to their fate. This could happen to both enemies or to members of pirate crews that transgressed the agreed polity. Marooning, however, shows how pirate violence was a matter of consequences. It wasn’t an habitual, automatic or systemic action. As Stephen Snelders reports, pirates lived outside the borders of a civilisationally

defined order of good and evil. They made their own law and behaved as they liked within the confines of their own customs. This varied from pirate to pirate and ship to ship and case to case.

I turn now to following Gabriel Kuhn's *Life Under the Jolly Roger* more closely and especially the third chapter which discusses pirate culture. I followed Kuhn's book in a major way before when discussing pirates in *Black Flag* and this was not simply because I agreed with him – since I often didn't. Kuhn does have a way of raising pertinent issues, however, and this was why I took his narrative as a guide. Of first importance here, something I picked up much earlier in this piece about pirates, is that pirates were an *ethos* of their own. For me this functions as a marker of anarchy in a way it does not for Kuhn (because Kuhn thinks of anarchy in terms of a world polity of general benevolence that pirates could never stand in for or represent). Pirates, however, we can both agree, were not overt anarchists – they were pirates pirating. They were men who lived their own lives to their own standards. For me, that is anarchy in a way it is not for Kuhn. Either way, I think it is an *ethos*. Kuhn, in his account, seems to delight in not letting people build "pirate utopias" or idealistic constructions based on conclusions made about pirates. In this I think he is too dogmatic in his own way, most particularly when it comes to piracy and anarchy. I think that comes down to too much idealising of his own kind about what anarchy MUST look like in a pre-determined way. I concentrate on what anarchy has looked like and can look like. It has looked like pirates (and it can look like them too).

The ethnic and ethical point, the point that pirates created an *ethos* ("the characteristic spirit of a culture") of their own, is an important one in all of this. In doing so, they became Rediker's "villains of all nations" but also villains of no nation and of their own, outlaw nation. They consciously existed, with their own flag of allegiance, the flag of carousing

devilment, outside of the civilised world, a world upon which they preyed. Kuhn says of this:

*"The eventual rejection of any national allegiance marks the biggest difference between the golden age pirates and the buccaneers who preceded them. Among the golden age pirates, the anti-national notion becomes stronger, not least in the adoption of the Jolly Roger as their truly transnational symbol... Pirates doubly defied the nationalist logic ... first by forming themselves of the 'outcasts of all nations' (mixing together the seafarers of all countries, as suggested earlier), and second by attacking vessels regardless of the flag flying at the mainmast, making all nations and their shipping equal prey..."*

*At the same time, it is without doubt true that in a world increasingly dominated by the nation-state system, it became an issue of first importance that pirates 'had not any Commission from any Prince or Potentate,' and that they posed a significant threat to the nation-state—both confirmed by their reputation as 'banditti of all nations' and the fact that legal scholars have called piracy the 'first international crime.'... we must not forget the symbolic significance of a free-roaming community under a non-nation-state flag, especially in light of the ever increasing regulation of migration and border control. The golden age pirates' obvious defiance of any such notions must stand as a powerful reminder of how things ought to be, and as an unrelenting protest against conditions that force millions of people every year to cross borders under hazardous circumstances. Many of these people do not survive these crossings—some of them drown in the very waters that the golden age pirates once proudly roamed. By taunting the nation-state, the golden age pirates expressed a simple truth: namely, that 'it signified nothing what part of the World a man liv'd in, so he Liv'd well'."*



Pirates, then, were not just renegades from Christian polity but also from the nation states of civilisation. They rejected the very idea of “nation” for a voluntaristic ethos of brotherhood made by and for its members alone (an association). This, too, is anarchy; it is heresy and apostasy and social rebellion, acts of cultural production, things which include both “opportunistic unions” and “pragmatic interests”. Individual pirates, we should remain convinced, almost certainly came along with the prejudices they had learned in civilisation. These could be gendered, racial, religious, nationalistic, etc. But the emerging and self-actualised pirate ethos was a move towards something new and different, something that should never be judged by the standards of twenty first century identity politics. Piracy was a self-arbitrating polity of its own. It did not care what outsiders thought for it had chosen not to care about that and, indeed, to differentiate itself from it. Pirates were creating a freedom to create their own context of shared existence as inculcated through their articles of association and connected traditions. This, at a minimum, created new contexts for shared existence that had not existed before and which perhaps does not often exist without them.

This brings us to more specific pirate matters and the first of these is women. We saw above in the articles of Black Bart that women were strictly forbidden to the extent that bringing a woman aboard would result in the death of the pirate doing so. It is not entirely clear why. Commentators point out that some thought women at sea bad luck. Then there was the obvious potential for dissension to break out between members of the crew over a woman. A further consideration is that life at sea was hard, requiring physical strength, and for many women it simply would not have been a realistic possibility, a fact which may have led to a general judgment on the part of pirates in regard to women whole and entire. Some seem to think of pirates as women haters but this is surely ridiculous when numerous ports at the time of their existence could tell tales

of pirates surging ashore to enjoy the pleasures of love in a woman's company. It seems to me, as I have already said before, that pirates were extremely functional people – and so women had their functions just like anything or anyone else.

Two female scholars, Ulrike Klausmann and Marion Meinzerin, have their own take on this across various kinds of piracy generally but not least in relation to the period and type I am here specifically discussing in their book *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*. Most particularly, this concerns the two most famous female pirates, who are confirmed as real people, Anne Bonny, an Irishwoman, and Mary Read, an Englishwoman. Both grew up disguised as boys, Bonny being born as something of an embarrassment to her father outside wedlock and Read as the daughter of a single mother who had previously lost a son that died whereupon her mother simply pretended that the later and illegitimate Mary was the son, and as adults found that they could best secure their continued existence by dressing as men, a trick that was not totally unknown at the time as scholars have discovered when researching the issue. Both Anne and Mary eventually ended up as pirates on the same ship, that of the pirate Calico Jack (which was fortunate for them given that we know other ships and crews might have rejected them out of hand or worse), where they disclosed their secret identities to each other (when they took a fancy to each other) and to the captain on a “need to know” basis. Here, however, something Klausmann and Meinzerin note is of importance:

*“there were few women among the colonialists. In the eyes of the European rulers, this was the reason that white men were entering into long-term relationships with black women, and it conflicted with their racist ideals. It was acceptable as long as a white men raped his slaves, or at worst punished them, because he had ‘disgraced himself before God and shamed all Christians by dirtying his body and lying with a Negro woman.’ But to live*

*together with a black woman, or to have a child with her, was forbidden. In the French areas, for example, a white man who had a child with a black woman was required to pay a penalty of 2,000 pounds of sugar. The woman would be sent to a special 'home,' and could not be bailed out at any price.*

*Concern for the preservation of the white race finally prompted the governments and trade companies to organise a kind of trade in girls and women overseas. The Dutch East India Company paid a reward to every family going to Batavia who took at least two daughters of eight years or older along. There were additional payments for 'respectable young maidens' brought along from orphanages. This group of girls was under the governor's direct guardianship. They were only allowed to marry company employees or free citizens—and that only with the governor's permission."*

Anne Bonny came to piracy by way of being brought to the colonies by her father. But she ran off with the first sailor who caught her eye (she was, as you might imagine, the rebellious sort) and thereafter fled to the pirate haven of New Providence, leaving a charge of attempting to kill her father behind her as she did. The historical situation at the time, however, as Klausmann and Meinzerin inform us, was that:

*"Women were forced to acquire a man as protection, for a woman who belonged to no man effectively belonged to all of them. Married women were in every sense their husband's property; husbands could sell or kill their wives with impunity. This was the fate of one-eyed Hawkins, who had been auctioned publicly by her husband. For the crime of absconding from her second owner, Hawkins was captured and sent as a slave in chains to Virginia. She again succeeded in escaping, this time to New Providence."*

This, however, is only to speak of the few white, European women who made it to the colonies. As for the black or native women:

*"they had to work as slaves and were treated by the white rulers as sexual objects, or as birthing machines for making new slaves. According to the situation on the market, they would sometimes be prevented from having children, and sometimes forced to have them. There were times when it was more affordable to buy than to breed... when it had become more difficult to capture blacks in Africa, sixteen-year old slave women were forced to become mothers, and agricultural associations felt no shame in labelling seventeen-year old girls who had already borne several children 'good breeders,' as though they were cattle or swine."*

Anne Bonny would, as stated, run away from her father in the colonies with a sailor (James Bonny) whom she married but that did not last. She would meet Calico Jack (John Rackam) in the pirate den of New Providence and join his crew, also having a child after becoming his lover. They met Mary Read when she, seeking her fortune by acting as a man in male settings such as the infantry or merchant shipping, signed onto a merchant vessel bound for the West Indies which was captured by pirates. She was the only crew member of the merchant vessel the pirates insisted come with them. And so she would eventually meet Anne Bonny and Calico Jack. One might wonder how Bonny and Read got away with hanging around with pirates when they seem so strictly and uniformly male companies – even having articles which demand this as did those of Black Bart we saw above which were not unusual. Lest we think that they must have had very good disguises, it must immediately be pointed out that this did not seem to be the case. Perhaps the disguises might fool the casual or brief acquaintance in the hustle and bustle of every day life but ships were not the places for such occasions. The reasoning for

Bonny and Read's action itself is explained by the simple fact that men had many more economic opportunities than women. If you could pass as a man this was then an active economic option for a better chance of survival. To live as a woman put you in a very different situation to a man. Klausmann and Meinzerin, for example, report that:

*"There were plenty of reasons to attempt such a switch. In the eighteenth century women had no opportunity to determine their own lives. A woman who married did little more than change her effective owner from her father to her husband, who could do with her as he pleased. Women could not move freely without male 'protection,' and so it became a custom that a woman who desired to travel alone disguised herself as a man."*

Imagine, then, the attraction of the pirate ship to the woman who could brave, and pass within, the male environment. To pass in an all male community, being a woman, was to achieve a great leap forward in one's own personal liberty. But this was not without huge risk. Many pirate crews would, with certainty, have rejected the likes of Bonny and Read absolutely out of hand (and who knows to what end result). But, as I have already made it important to note, all ships, crews and captains were different. What one did did not bind the others. Bonny and Read were fortunate, then, to find themselves meeting Calico Jack rather than, say, Black Bart or Blackbeard who were much more militant pirates that would not have accepted them. We may be sure, however, that Bonny and Read were known to be women by the crew of Calico Jack's ship since conditions on board made it virtually impossible that they could not be discovered:

*"That the majority of women who are known to us as transvestites were involved at sea or in the military may well be attributable to the fact that these are the areas where a woman was most likely to be discovered. (Scholars) describe how difficult it was to hide one's sex on*

*a ship. There was as good as no privacy on board. Several persons would sleep together in narrow quarters, and there was no certainty of not being seen when going to the toilet. Washing and changing did not pose too much of a risk, as this was actually infrequent behaviour given the ideas at that time about hygiene. But discovery could cost the woman her life. As it says in the Bible: "A woman Shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 22:5, King James Revised). Reason enough, in the view of the authorities, to level the death penalty for transvestites.*

*In 1643, King Charles I of England decreed the following law: 'No woman shall falsify her sex by wearing a man's clothing. She subjects herself thusly to the strictest penalty that the Law or Our wrath may ordain.'"*

As it happens, we are told by near contemporaneous sources that Bonny and Read dressed as men when fighting as pirates or on the hunt for targets but at other times on board they dressed as women. How they managed to become accepted and co-exist amongst the crew as equals, however, can be put down to two reasons:

First, Calico Jack was no big shot of Golden Age piracy. In fact, he is probably only known because of Anne Bonny and Mary Read. As David Cordingly says in *Under the Black Flag*:

*"There is no record of Calico Jack using torture or murder, and he seems to have gone out of his way to treat his victims with restraint. When he had finished looting a Madeira ship, he returned the vessel to her master and arranged for Hosea Tisdale, a Jamaican tavern keeper, to be given a passage home. Compared to Bartholomew Roberts and Blackbeard, who commanded forty-gun warships and sailed into action with a flotilla of supporting*

*vessels, Calico Jack was a small-time pirate. He preferred to operate with a modest sloop, and he restricted his attacks to small fishing boats and local trading ships. His chief claim to fame lay not in his exploits during his two years as a pirate captain but in his association with the female pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny, whose lives were considerably more adventurous and interesting than his own."*

Second, and most importantly, Anne Bonny and Mary Read must have made *bloody good pirates*. They had to. They had to probably out-perform most of the male crew in order to compensate for their sex disadvantage. They could only be accepted as equals if they in fact were the equal of any man on board. Bonny and Read were masculine females as well as experienced transvestites. There is something of necessity in this but it was still their choice to pursue it at their own potential cost. Gabriel Kuhn, as is his way, tries to make something negative out of this – it meant Bonny and Read denying their femininity – “just as freedom meant noble status for a man, it meant male status for a woman” – but I think this is a harsh assessment. Kuhn also says that Bonny and Read succeeded entirely through their own efforts rather than because of pirate radicality but, again, I think he goes too far. Such a sentiment completely overlooks that some pirates would have rejected them outright and that, as I say again, all pirates were different. There was no one pirate response to such a situation and, indeed, if there had been it would have been a denial of the fundamental independence which was at the root of all piracy. Kuhn wants to try and argue that pirates were not as radical as some modern commenters or activists would wish to make them but such arguments are an irrelevance. Calico Jack’s pirates did know that Bonny and Read were women physically but the fact that they pirated as good as any man among them gave them the acceptance, male or female, that only it could. And that says something about both these pirates AND Anne Bonny and Mary Read without any doubt whatsoever. It also tells us that Bonny and Read must have been

violent for piracy was advanced through violence and taking part in the company of “anarchic violent men” was how any pirate proved their own piratical credentials. Anne Bonny and Mary Read could, consequently, not have been shy, retiring females. They were fighters and were as ready to use violence as any of the men on board. Klausmann and Meinzerin in fact recount tales that speak to this fact on behalf of both women:

*“Anne Bonny took pains to maintain her rough image, for example by severely beating one fellow who annoyed her with a chair, or by relieving her fencing master of his buttons during a duel, one by one, with the point of her dagger.*

*There are stories about Mary Read as well, of how she would challenge opponents to duels and kill them without remorse. One source diverges from Daniel Defoe’s report. In her book, Storia della Pirateria del mondo, Anna Franchi writes of a conflict between Mary Read and a helmsman, a man who knew, as did the rest of the pirates, that Mary was a woman, although at the time she was still dressing as a man. The helmsman refused to obey Mary’s orders, and slapped her in the face. She promptly challenged him to a duel. In keeping with the usual law on pirate ships, she asked for permission to duel with him at the next landing. Once on land, the helmsman wanted to back out, but Mary insisted on restoring her honour. His gun did not fire. Mary, now certain of her life, approached him, opened her shirt, showed him her pale breasts, and said: ‘You wretch, you knew I was a woman and yet you dared to strike me. This woman shall now kill you, to make an example for all who would dare to insult her.’ And she blew out his brains.”*

Such stories show that, regardless of sex or gender expectations, a pirate was, in some pirate company, simply one who convincingly played pirate. If you did the job, that was good enough. As David Cordingly puts this: “ These and other women were able to survive



in a man's world by proving themselves as capable as the men in battle and in their duties as seamen." There was no other way they could survive. Further, and to contradict Kuhn once more, this DOES say something about pirates in distinction to regular society – for Bonny and Read would have only found acceptance, if at all, in a gendered woman's role and social status there: they would have needed "a man's protection" and possibly had to take up prostitution, the ultimate fallback position for any woman in a man's, male-created world. But at least among pirates, with their own ways and customs, you could prove yourself beyond the strict strictures of such a dogmatically gendered polity and so explode society's boundaries and expectations for womanhood. Pirates, thus, WERE different and, to that extent, (more) radical.

But did this argued for radicality express itself in other ways that might be of interest? I think it did – and specifically SEXUALLY. Multiple commentators suggest that pirates may have preferred unmarried shipmates. To some extent this fits with the common prohibition against women and children which were, one might argue, simple matters of practicality at sea. One cannot be an effective pirate vessel with families on board. Of course, a further option is that men had "run away to sea" and left family responsibilities behind in a past life. But what did these men then do for love or companionship in a now (almost) all male community? The French buccaneer Alexandre Exquemelin wrote a contemporaneous account of his experiences as a buccaneer in the years immediately before the Golden Age. In his book he wrote of the system known as the *matelotage* system as follows:

*"It is a general and solemn custom amongst them all to seek out for a comrade or companion, whom we may call partner, in their fortunes, with whom they join the whole stock of what they possess, towards a mutual and reciprocal gain. This is done also by*

*articles drawn and signed on both sides, according to what has been agreed between them. Some of these constitute their surviving companion absolute heir to what is left by the death of the first of the two. Others, if they be married, leave their estates to their wives and children; others to other relations."*

*Matelotage* was a system in which men took male companions amongst the buccaneers. It could be described as a civil and voluntary union of two men, irrespective of other relations. But we can go further than this and speak of undisputed homosexuality amongst pirates. Klausmann and Meinzerin, for example, in speculating whether Bonny and Read were lesbian lovers (a possibility they imagine their contemporaries would have been completely unable to comprehend in their time even though Bonny and Read were themselves reported as being found in bed together), tell us that "homosexuality among men was no secret". B.R. Burg, in his *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*, argues that homosexual sex was not an exclusive form of sexuality amongst pirates but a form often engaged in. Gabriel Kuhn notes that no pirate articles have ever been discovered which forbade it – which is significant when one realises that, in the civilised world, it was uniformly forbidden and, indeed, drew a formal sentence of death in both male (gay) and female (lesbian) cases. In the Christianised world of liberal polity homosexuality (although it had not yet been recognised as such and was thus more usually denominated, in a very male-centric way, as the act of "sodomy" – anal sex) was outlawed and forbidden so would not a free community that had sprung up in great contradiction to political and moral normality feel free to go its own way? The English writer Daniel Defoe, much interested in pirates during his career which was contemporaneous with the Golden Age, shows evidence of knowing that pirate crews were significantly made up of those not averse to homosexual activity, then thought of as an individual crime. This would have affected women, however, too since both men and women had the same societies and

cultures in common and so would have imbibed the same cultural values. Writing about this is the context of Bonny and Read, Klausmann and Meinzerin say:

*"Love relationships among women where one of them did not play a man were not even perceived as such. It barely posed a threat to the men of the eighteenth century when a woman in women's clothing loved a woman in women's clothing. On the contrary, as Lilian Fadermann concludes in Koestlicher als die Liebe der Männer [More Delicious than the Love of Men]—a study of romantic and passionate relationships between upper-class women in previous centuries—men often had no objections to such relationships. Fathers were reassured that the 'honour' of their daughters, meaning their highly valued 'virginity,' was not endangered. A husband did not need fear that another man was 'putting the horns' on him, meaning that his wife might bear the child of another man as his heir. The female friends were not seen as competitors. They could not endanger a marriage, for women were economically dependent on their men.*

*But when women dressed as men, when they had the temerity to claim the privileges of a man, to live independently or freely choose a profession—insofar as class differences allowed—then lesbian love became punishable. Of course, transvestites were persecuted even when no love relationship with a woman could be demonstrated.*

*(The scholars) Dekker and Pol point out that milder punishments were always meted out to transvestites who disguised themselves as men out of love for a man, for example, in order to accompany a lover on his ship. The strictest punishments were reserved for women in male clothing who had a love relationship with a woman, or even married a woman, which was not uncommon. Most of the latter who were discovered were burned at the stake or hanged."*

We can see here that, in terms of sexuality and gender, those in the early 1700s were living in a world very different to our own. Yet it would have been the values and culture of that time that our pirates would have had to imaginatively and actively think themselves out of and so beyond – if it ever occurred to them to do so (which we should imagine it did not in every case). This, by the by, is also true of modern commentators on former piracy, not all of whom seem personally disposed to even the reality of homosexuality itself. Accordingly, many play down its actuality whilst, of course, not denying its strict possibility. The suggestive fact remains, however, as Kuhn notes, that “life in the pirate settlements offered greater latitude of individual behaviour than anywhere else.” It would certainly have been safer to be a gay pirate than to be a gay member of a merchant or naval vessel or a gay member of land-lubbing normal society. The point can be made here that if one was a gay pirate, or one not averse to gay sexual contact as part of a more all-encompassing sexual proclivity, then among fellow pirates was the place that this was, on the whole, least likely to be judged.

The scholar who is most in favour of the idea of significant homosexuality amongst pirates is B.R. Burg. Since pirates did not keep records of their regular sexual encounters or their orientations (sexual orientation not even being an idea that had yet been invented) Burg, to some extent, makes his arguments by analogy to other all-male environments about which some scientific statistical work has been done (military environments and prisons). Consequently, he makes observations such as the following:

*“sexual activity in prisons increases, sometimes to rather high rates, as the order of custody is lowered. If freedom from social and behavioral constraints increased sexual activity for buccaneers as it apparently does for convicts, then the West Indian sea rovers surely made the most of their liberty. Many were men with abiding hatreds of rules and regulations*

*acquired after terms of service in the merchant and naval services. They gloried in the freedom or license they enjoyed as buccaneers, and, if research on modern convicts does in fact provide clues to pirate behavior, it seems likely enough that their joy in exercising their wills was not confined only to the non-sexual phases of their lives."*

In addition to this the obvious point must be made that the only sexual possibilities available to men at sea for extended periods were either to masturbate (in places that were not necessarily that private at all as previously mentioned – which basically suggests any masturbation was likely to become public masturbation at any time) or activities with other men. Only when making landfall in the wider world in either some pirate enclave or a town or village populated by others of the outside world could the possibility for heterosexual encounters be entertained (rape of potential female captives aside). Pirates were not exactly unknown for their proclivity for wild debauches of dancing, music and sex after successful raids but, it seems to me, it would be an overly brave observer who then stipulated that the debauchery they enjoyed or engaged in would be strictly of one sexual kind or another. Besides, on land the rules of the sea (particularly in regard to women) were not so immediately applicable and one could indulge oneself with partners of any sex or sexual preference with impunity. In this regard, however, Burg makes the following commentary:

*"In their relationships with women, pirates seemed to prefer situations where the females could easily be dominated. Native women, under this circumstance, made excellent sexual partners for men inclined to vary their largely male experiences. They were heathen, dark-skinned, and regarded as moral, spiritual, and racial inferiors by xenophobic English or European pirates. Native sexual customs that differed in substance from those familiar to pirates also contributed toward easing psychological disabilities in dealing with members of*

*the opposite sex. Most commentators noted that native women could be bought easier than raped, Captain William Cowley remarking that in one tribe the men had no qualms about sharing their wives with Europeans but were intensely jealous over advances made by other tribesmen. Another pirate noted that native females were quite willing to submit to the desires of Englishmen, and William Betagh added that 'any man may lye with the [California Indian] women for a rusty knife, or a porringer of thick milk'...*

*Aboard the Revenge, commanded by pirate John Phillips, the crew adopted as one of their regulations an article stating 'If at any Time we meet with a prudent Woman, that Man that offers to meddle with her, without her Consent, shall suffer present Death,' and a member of Bartholomew Roberts's crew, a pirate nicknamed Little David, actually set himself up as guard and protector of a captured woman. One man could not have done this aboard any pirate ship without at least the tacit consent of his comrades, and although Little David raped his charge in short order, it is nonetheless true that there was some effort to preserve her honor that was sanctioned by the crew. There are numerous other examples of men who were no respectors either of property or persons striving to prevent the abuse of captured women. One of the rules posted by William Betagh's crew in 1719 stated that 'Every man aboard a prize found drunk, or in any indecent act with a white or black women, to be punished according to the nature of his offense.' There were without doubt sound tactical reasons for such a regulation, but had the crew been lusting for women over months or even years, rules of that nature would not have been promulgated by men with little respect for law, custom, or the persons of captives. In another incident, a pirate crew killed all the males on a ship they had taken, but the one female found aboard was not raped or sexually abused in any way. She was simply tossed overboard in the fashion of any other unwanted material."*

What we learn from these comments is that pirates were neither simply rapists nor simply interested in women as sexual objects. Some, no doubt, were (heterosexual) rapists and took their opportunities as they found them. But we must, once again, remember not to generalise – either about a pirate's proclivity to rape or his desire for women generally. There is, in fact, further information here to digest:

*"The use of boys as sexual partners was not universally accepted among pirates. Some captains rejected the practice entirely, not because they were particularly repelled by notions of pederasty, but because they evidently believed the boys were a cause of conflict aboard ship. The men who served under Bartholomew Roberts were especially emphatic in this regard. They subscribed to a set of articles that provided 'No Boy or Women [was] to be allowed amongst them. If any Man were found seducing any of the latter Sex, and carry'd her to Sea, disguis'd, he was to suffer Death.' Significantly, there was no penalty for seducing a lad or smuggling him aboard. Pederasty was simply a violation of the rules not a capital crime."*

What then might we imagine as a general picture (remembering that generalisation in regard to pirates is dubious at the best of times)?:

*"The suitability of almost every member of a pirate crew as a sex partner for almost every other man means that aboard ship the potential for wide-spread promiscuity existed, but it is not entirely certain whether pirates availed themselves of the opportunities for frequent shifting of partners or for group sexual experiences. Several studies of homosexual patterns in large American cities indicate that promiscuity is fairly common, with many cases being reported of men having hundreds of partners within fairly limited time periods. The social imperatives that substantiate permanence among heterosexual couples—economic*

*necessity, religious beliefs, the presence of family, and peer pressure—are all considerably reduced in the case of homosexuals, but among buccaneers (and the later pirates of the Golden Age) they were entirely absent. The constantly changing composition of any ship's crew due to deaths from natural causes, desertion, those killed in combat, and the frequent arrival of men and boys captured aboard other vessels all may have made relationships of long duration between pirates difficult to perpetuate."*

The point I think I would make here is that, in pirate society, the situation was not as in the legalised and Christianised world beyond the flag of the Jolly Roger. Homosexuality was an accepted part of life, a proclivity which some enjoyed and others engaged in or accepted in others. Sexuality, we may imagine, was entertained, in the spirit of constant festival and "the temporary autonomous zone", on the same basis as everything else according to the pirate way and as a need to be satisfied was acquired and without breaking pirate custom – which was the most important thing. Pirate communities would certainly have been more open to everything from gay sex and pederasty to heterosexual sex outside wedlock than those in civilisation would have been in their much more policed environments. They no doubt availed themselves of foreign women, prostitutes, captives, youths and each other as they could and desired to. As Gabriel Kuhn then notes:

*"Among the men of this seafaring community, there was no need to hide sexual orientation, and the anxieties, psychological disruptions, and psychopathological difficulties that often result from this type of guilt and repression did not emerge..."*

*The almost universal homosexual involvement among pirates meant homosexual practices were neither disturbed, perverted, exotic, nor uniquely desirable among them, and the mechanisms for defending and perpetuating such practices, those things that set the*



*modern homosexual apart from heterosexual society, were never necessary. The male engaging in sexual activity with another male aboard a pirate ship in the West Indies three centuries past was simply an ordinary member of his community, completely socialized and acculturated."*

In this, I think the most important thing to remember is what a pirate was and what a pirate was signifying in his existence with others as pirates. Piracy was a life of crime, the life of a deliberate and wilful outlaw. "Outlaw" means "beyond the law", "in defiance of the law" and "completely disregarding of the law" all in one. It was a way of life voluntarily chosen for which one could, as many did, pay a high price. Pirates lived that life below "the banner of King Death" (as Marcus Rediker reports it in his book *Outlaws of the Atlantic*), a banner which was simultaneously signalling that the crew flew in the face of Christianity under a banner of allegiance to the Devil. It was a banner of those who flew in the face of established society and the civilisation it touted as the best and most progressive, the society of the nation state. It was the banner of those who, mostly, had escaped a world in which they were formerly incarcerated in wooden floating prisons, subject to a severe and arbitrary discipline. As Marcus Rediker in the same source states:

*"The pirate captain or quartermaster asked the seamen of the captured vessel who among them would serve under black colors, and frequently several stepped forward. Many fewer pirates originated as mutineers who had boldly and collectively seized control of a merchant vessel. But regardless of their methods, pirates necessarily came from seafaring employments, whether the merchant service, the navy, or privateering. Piracy emphatically was not an option open to landlubbers, since sea robbers 'entertain'd so contemptible a Notion of Landmen'... Almost without exception, pirates, like the larger body of seafaring men, came from the lower class of humanity. They were, as a royal official condescendingly*

*observed, 'desperate Rogues' who could have little hope in life ashore. These traits served as bases of unity when men of the sea decided, in search of something better, to become pirates."*

Pirates, according to Rediker, considered themselves "risk-sharing partners" in a common venture. We can see, above, how Black Bart's articles of association favoured the preservation and maintenance of the collectivity – which was their main concern – and we have learned that it was a festal collectivity, about a life to be enjoyed for as long as it lasted. So it is important to note that this was a collectivity of free men (and occasionally free masculine women) and that this freedom was fundamental to the survival of the collective as a new and different social development. As a consequence, crews were tightly bonded by their common mentality, traditions and desires to associate. They developed their own, unique socialities, not just as a common brotherhood but from ship to ship. Pirate ships, as many commentators confirm, never attacked each other. They attacked those who were not pirates. They had a collective sense of themselves which included what Rediker calls "a collective sense of transgression". It was not that a pirate might offend another pirate (though this was always a possibility) but that he might offend the collective and its ways. Crewmen who simply didn't fit in were likely to be marooned as disruptive to the ship and its community in general and not because they had had an argument with a particular crew member. Personal disputes were likely to be resolved man to man at the next stop. As Rediker here adds: "The social relations of piracy were marked by vigorous, often violent, antipathy toward traditional authority. The pervasive anti-authoritarianism of the culture of the common seafarer found many expressions beneath the Jolly Roger." Pirates, we may say, shared a common consciousness and it was a consciousness in, and of, the common.

They had a group identity of which the Jolly Roger is the most obvious demonstration. It demonstrated that pirates wished to terrify their prey, the detested owners and operators of merchant ships or naval vessels, whilst simultaneously making their allegiances plain in symbolic forms they had determined themselves. As Rediker expounds upon this:

*"The self-righteousness of pirates was strongly linked to a world—traditional, mythical, or Utopian—'in which men are justly dealt with,' as described by (the historian Eric) Hobsbawm. It found expression in their social rules, their egalitarian social organization, and their notions of revenge and justice. By walking 'to the Gallows without a Tear,' by calling themselves 'Honest Men' and 'Gentlemen,' and by speaking self-servingly but proudly of their 'Conscience' and 'Honor,' pirates flaunted their certitude. When, in 1720, ruling groups concluded that 'nothing but force will subdue them,' many pirates responded by intensifying their commitment. Edward Low's crew in 1724 swore 'with the most direful Imprecations, that if ever they should find themselves overpower'd they would immediately blow their ship up rather than suffer themselves to be hang'd like Dogs.' These sea robbers would not "do Jolly Roger the Disgrace to be struck." The consciousness of kind among pirates manifested itself in an elaborate social code. Through rule, custom, and symbol, the code prescribed specific behavioral standards intended to preserve the social world that pirates had creatively built for themselves. As the examples of revenge reveal, royal officials recognized the threat of the pirates' alternative order. Some authorities feared that pirates might "set up a sort of Commonwealth"—and they were precisely correct in their designation—in uninhabited regions, since 'no Power in those Parts of the World could have been able to dispute it with them.' But the consciousness of kind never took national shape, and piracy was soon suppressed."*

It remains only to ask, at this juncture, if pirates could be inspirational to those of us who read of them three centuries after their swift demise as we wander through the Wasteland. Stephens Snelders (as with Gabriel Kuhn in my own *Black Flag*) thinks not:

*"Attempts to cast the pirates as role models for social liberation are too simplistic, if only because of the ethical problematic of their activities: particularly as regards the violence they directed not only against the 'great' but also against more defenseless victims. This ambiguity cannot, and I think need not be resolved. We must attempt to understand pirates from the perspective of the violent world in which they lived, and consider the context of the incarcerated life of common sailors."*

Snelders, as Kuhn before him, seems to be suffering from moral qualms induced by his own social and cultural location which the pirates he has written about, one imagines, would have (quite rightly) laughed at. He seems happy to leave pirates as men of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and relativise them as moral inferiors in consequence. There can be no doubt, as Snelders later recognises, that pirates "brought not only liberation and pleasure, but also death and violence". Is this a problem? For the fact is that Snelders and all of us live in a world right now based on ever increasing, systemic and institutionalised violence of the sort that pirates directly reacted against and sought revenge upon in pursuit of their own measures of both survival and freedom. It remains a fantasy case that, perhaps, if the pirates had managed to turn a small floating rebellion into an entire way of life then the much more incarcerating and systemically violent world we are living in may never have even come to pass.

The pirates wouldn't have cared about that, however, and it certainly wasn't their aim. They caroused, debauched, fought and loved for themselves, for however short a time –

and it was enough. They had no pretension to be the architects of a new global politics. Some see that as their failure. Others may see it as their greatest characteristic. In order to generate survival in the Wasteland no one must ever seek to rule over it.

“A merry life and a short one shall be my motto.”

## **On Accepting Pirates as Anarchist Examples Whole and Entire: "What is Anarchy?" Once Again**

Since I first took pirates as anarchist examples some years ago now, various people have queried my identification of them as such and particularly questioned their suitability for such a thing (or as social role models at all, in fact). Such people were often not those who regarded themselves as anarchists, although they were often those who regarded themselves as socially progressive, on the side of "the good guys". One could describe the pirates of the Golden Age I took as my examples as, in some ways, "socially progressive" themselves (as my previous essays have attempted to show to some degree) but I have always also been clear in my own mind that we were always simultaneously talking about people who would kill and torture others without qualm if they found such activities necessary. Given that their chosen lifestyle was stealing from others, at gun or sword point if necessary, this made the possibility of regular conflict (and so the need for violence) somewhat more than likely as a result.

Often it is things like this which make others, although in some respects sympathetic to the pirates in their historical circumstances, shy away. Violence, they imagine, is wrong and its deliberate use leaves a stain that cannot be washed off or otherwise hidden. As one liberal academic familiar with the modern deeds of those described by modern polity as "terrorists" (which, in their time and place, is what pirates were seen as by officialdom) then actually wrote to me: "Fighting for what you believe in is one thing but how you do it matters. And how and who it hurts." Added to this sentiment, we may recall the statements of Stephen Snelders and Gabriel Kuhn, modern academic piratologists, who complain that since the pirates only really acted for themselves, we cannot go giving them benevolent motives or imagining them as modern inspirations to social justice.

Instead, so they seem to imagine, we must relativise them to their times and circumstances – and regard them as unfortunately morally inferior to our much more moral selves. This is a shame, they seem to imagine, but we cannot go giving our blessing to such obviously violent and selfish men. Perhaps, in this, my modern commentators are speaking from a position in which “human rights” now play a part and, as the liberal academic I mentioned who is familiar with modern terrorism remarked to me, we cannot go giving rights to some but not others – for that then seems to undermine the very notion of “rights” in the first place. (Assuming, that is, you do not imagine “rights” self-undermined as an idea anyway if said “rights” are only active inasmuch as they are granted and maintained by others who may, at any moment or on a whim, choose not to do so.)

“Rights”, consequently, are the problems of modern liberal academics arguing with the governments and courts and security officers who selectively, and hypocritically, apply or disapply them, and not of sea-faring pirates from 300 years ago who were fighting for their own lives in freedom from state-organised violence. If those with modern concerns for such things hold it against pirates that they acted with violence and that they acted only for themselves then I myself see this as no deterrent to the identification with anarchy that I previously made. Of course, in order to make this identification I have to have notions of both piracy and anarchy in order to do so – and both must pass muster. It is my intention in this essay to go over those again in order to restate said identification.

First, then, to pirates who I have described fairly fully and with some detail in previous work. My example was always specific in that I focused especially on the Golden Age of Piracy that is roughly 1690-1725 – a 35 year period now 300 years in our past. I do not just think of any “pirate” from any time and place as the kind of pirate I am particularly talking about when I talk about “pirates”. (So modern East African pirates trying to hijack

international cargo ships is not in my view here.) If my equating of piracy with anarchy is confusing to you, that specific identification should go at least some way to clearing it up. I am talking about a specific body of men (and a few women) in a specific time and place who engaged in specific historical activity and left evidence for their codes of conduct and rules of association. They thus had a somewhat measurable way of life it is possible to consider in the round. This body of men formed a conscious brotherhood of around 5,000 people across the period and they lived in conscious and violent defiance of the civilised polity of the colonialist Europeans from whom they had often come (a few black Africans, Muslim Arabs and other indigenous types from the margins of the Atlantic aside). Their means of existence was thievery on the high seas and they did this for the furtherance and preservation of their own, separate polity rather than as the means of a new, universal world order. Their own polity was based on a fundamental independence of both individuals and crews and so what one does we cannot bind others by. It was very much a case of “each to his own” as a means of relationship.

Anarchy, on the other hand, I have always characterised, first and foremost, as a matter of “agency, autonomy and free association” in human relations. I have simultaneously imagined anarchist society as built on the basis of affinity relations in a context of the active denial of centralised power and so in a context of decentralisation and possible federation in what is a fairly standard understanding of anarchist organisation coming, first of all, from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. My own flavour of anarchy has actively combined both aspects of social anarchism (people acting and living in groups) and egoistic anarchism (freedom begins with me and my ownness – to put it in Stirner’s language). Thus, I developed the concept of “social egoism” as a phrase which explains how I understand anarchy and further understand anarchy, as an idea, as summed up in the reality of “self-organisation” – which I regard as a biological principle of life itself. This



biological impetus should be a further clue to my way of understanding anarchy too in that I focus very much more on anarchy than anarchism. I do not think of anarchy as in any sense a dogma and I do not think it has “rules” one can transgress – for I imagine it, naturalistically, as primarily about relationships rather than rules. Anarchy is “no leaders” – and, thus, the anarchist is one who lives as if there are none by their own direct action according to their own manifest desires. Pure and simple. This, however, I imagine, does not lead to crazed and destructive chaos but to those who take the responsibility for living ethically upon themselves. Anarchy I see as a responsibility and not merely just an obvious liberty. Anarchy *as a way of life* is then imagined an ethical and responsible thing based on relationships modulated by ethics and responsibilities voluntarily taken up. Consequently, it exists “beyond good and evil”, as Nietzsche put it, and the anarchy I imagine annihilates all concepts of “authority”, material or moral, that are anything other than voluntarily engaged and functionally relevant.

It should be seen straightaway that there is some compatibility here but that is not usually the concern of the reluctant or the naysayers in regard to my bringing into relationship of the pirates I talk about and anarchy. More to the point for them is that pirates are violent or selfish or immoral (or all three). They kill, steal and maybe even rape. They do so for their own pleasure, satisfaction and maintenance. But this confuses me for, taking my naturalistic, post-Cynic understanding of anarchy onboard, what about anarchy specifically is non-violent or unselfish or moral? What about human life on earth mandates that people must exist only in ways non-violent or unselfish or moral? What concerns me in such judgments is that anarchy has then been turned into some sort of obligating moral code that both can be and should be policed which I do not imagine it is or can ever be if it is properly to be understood as a situation in which “authority” is consistently and actively confounded. Anarchy, in my understanding, is not benevolent authority neither imagined

benevolent forced organisation. It can never be systematic coercion. It is the denial of authority pure and simple and in all except voluntarily accepted ways for functional purposes.

So it appears to me, when such conversations take place, that the naysayers to my identifications have made the mistake of taking their own cultural values and preferences and imposed them upon both the pirates of my recitation and anarchy in general – and, at least in the later case, that is most obviously bizarre. How can one imagine anarchy – an understanding of a world free from leaders and authority in general, a naturalistic domain of “do as you please” – and then make it about rules, morals and obligations that apply to everyone whether they agree or not? You might reply that the pirates themselves seem to have had “rules, morals and obligations” – and I agree that they did. But they invented their rules, morals and obligations for themselves, from ship to ship and crew to crew, and then consciously committed themselves to them with their brothers together. Such things were never imposed, never imagined as a prospective world polity or universal understanding of all relationships henceforth, things which applied to outsiders as well. Indeed, it is clear from historical studies of the pirates that they saw those within and those without their communities in completely different ways. Their ways of being were then different depending on who they were dealing with accordingly. They had created their own ethos, and so their own community of people, in distinction to all the other people of the world. They even created their own flags in order to symbolise and signify this. It is then my submission that anarchy is precisely this: an active self-organisation and self-actualisation of yourself as that you wish to be and to become. And there is and can be no moral or material obligation over and above that – not least because, in anarchy, YOU CAN ONLY OBLIGATE YOURSELF.

That being the case, questions of violence and selfishness and morality are moot (or, if you prefer, relative). Rather, the anarchist question to ask is “Who or what can obligate me?” And the answer can only be “I, myself, alone.” This is not in contradiction with what I have already said about ethics and responsibility for they are also understood as things invented and created from within (although not necessarily alone should we seek to balance social and egoistic concerns in our deliberations). In anarchy, you obligate *yourself* to an ethics and make *yourself* responsible. One of the further ways I have imagined both anarchists and pirates is as “free spirits” and that is a phrase I took and adapted from Nietzsche where, in his native German as “Freigeiste”, it means not simply free people, people of free conscience, but people of independent mind and thought. And that is to be understood as an active requirement deliberately pursued rather than as merely an abstract statement. One is to seek to be a “free spirit” in this sense even as one deliberately creates one’s own ethics and sense of responsibility. Therefore, the anarchy of which I speak, and which I see pre-eminently in the pirates, is one of deliberate and purposeful self-actualisation in ethical, responsible and independent directions. Such development is then imagined, socially and politically, to be that which, in its natural proliferation, confounds the very idea of centralised social power – even if only in that it creates “outlaws” who refuse their willed incarceration in societal and civilisational prisons that are equal parts moral and material – as aspects of the very ethicality, responsibility and independence sought.

Contrast all this with the coercive and active exploitation, not to say domination, of capitalist, patriarchal and colonial society which is fundamentally based in hypocritical relations of manipulation and forced dominance that no one is allowed to escape. Such society never even asks “Who can obligate me?”. It simply proceeds (often in ways ridiculously lauded as “democratic”) to dominate regardless in a system of relations all

about creating wealth, privilege and freedom disparities which are structural to the whole. Such society is inauthentic society for its evidenced values are duplicitous in regard to those advertised. It talks about “freedom” and “security” whilst policing, incarcerating (and even killing) at will and based only on its own divine fiat to rule. No one, as is often mentioned, was ever asked to voluntarily authenticate for themselves the very idea of “government” and the State very much exists on the same basis as a god. Its right to exist is very much assumed and imposed rather than existing as the result of willed human consensus. And it apparently can never be got rid of. Here the government-citizen relationship is one of obedience of the former to the latter in a hierarchy. The State-citizen relationship is one of the policed existence of the latter by the agents of the former. The authority of the formers in these constructions may be demonstrated with force, in addition, if it is too publicly questioned by the latters.

In contrast to such arrangements, both piracy and anarchy stand out and, in my estimation, with the former a legitimate expression of the latter. But there still remain those three charges of violence, selfishness and immorality to deal with in regard to it – so let us deal with them head on to address anarchy in the context of pirates and piracy specifically.

Anarchy, I hope no one would think, is the micro-management of individual behaviour by others. That way lies the police, physical coercion of behaviour, systemically arranged and prosecuted, by means of physical force. What is wrong about that, so I would argue an anarchist analysis finds, is that *it is systematically organised as a permanent and fixed arrangement of social and political relationships* and NOT merely in that it involves the use of force. What the anarchist abhors is centralised, and so coercive, power and, in fact, the anarchist could hardly abhor force by itself in the abstract for their own ethos is

fundamentally based on the effectiveness of their own force (individually or in tandem with others) in order to make their own values materially evident and effective. When Kropotkin (hardly a violent radical) tells people to possess the factories, farms and workplaces, or Malatesta explains that he wants people in general to “emancipate themselves”, they are relying on notions of physical force deployed for ethical, responsible and legitimate reasons. Historically, this included anarchist conferences agreeing that the use of dynamite was legitimate. Several others, proclaimed anarchists all, took to violent robbery or revenge killing against the forces of the status quo and thought this “anarchy”.

Of course, this is not to say that anarchy is, and always has been, violence. This is what the tabloids would have you believe. Even the formerly violent, such as Alexander Berkman, who attempted to murder a capitalist businessman, would later go into print to deny the necessary connection between violence and anarchism and would acknowledge that you can’t kill and murder your way to universal polity (see his *What is Anarchist Communism?* later reprinted as *ABC of Anarchism*). In addition, there have always been anarchist pacifists, whether the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, inspired by gospel depictions of Jesus’ non-violence, or modern protestors who call the cops on black blocks who smash windows and cause property damage. There is nothing wrong with an anarchist being a pacifist (though one questions the legitimacy of calling the cops on anyone) but there is something wrong, on the grounds of anarchy, with then insisting that all other anarchists, if not simply everyone else, be pacifists too. The situation is, in fact, more exactly like that of the pirates I have been describing for several years now in that each, in their independence, decided for themselves according to their own ethics, responsibility and intellectual and moral independence what they were going to be. So it is never that violence or force is illegitimate and ruled out of bounds by some wholly imagined

inherent nature of anarchy itself: it is that any force or violence you undertake is always on you. It comes exactly from the ethical responsibility and intellectual independence that I have been talking about. Anarchy, that is, validates or invalidates no actions whatsoever. It simply says that said actions are your responsibility and that they lead to consequences which are yours to deal with as well.

It is on this basis that self-proclaimed anarchists of the past (and pirates too in their own circumstances and situations) have shot bank tellers and robbed banks, stabbed presidents, smashed windows, damaged property, staged burglaries, and stolen online data from capitalist corporations to expose their corruption. Put in its simplest terms, one might in fact ask how one is supposed to advance one's own existence in the world (deliberately oppressed by the systemic power of centralising others as it may be) if one does not act for oneself? In these terms, the anarchist creed (by common consent) of "direct action" is simply another name for "force and violence". It mandates no one to carry out, or participate in, any particular act but it does make the point that the idea in anarchy is to act for yourself (which includes socially as "yourselves"). Materially. In reality. With consequence. On your own recognizance. Without permission. Individual conscience will decide what that precisely involves but I do not understand anarchy to be saying anything other than that. This description, however, almost exactly describes the pirates I discuss *including in the matter of their violence*. And they carry this through, taking responsibility for their actions (including in being captured and hung, or in being blown up or shot at sea) as well in acts of shining authenticity. In short, there is nothing about "anarchy" that completely annuls the use of violence or the legitimacy of force. Rather, it makes it the ethical and consequential responsibility of human beings thought of as intellectually and morally independent and responsible beings. So do as you will do. And on your head be it. That is how it works in anarchy.

This brings us to “selfishness” or the charge that pirates are somehow illegitimate, and not good anarchist role models, because they acted only for themselves. Well, first and foremost, yes, they absolutely did. It is undeniable. But who else should they have been acting for as deserters or mutineers from authoritarian wooden prisons to which they might, quite possibly, have been impressed in the first place, subsequently being made subject to violent and arbitrary discipline? In this case, as with the former one about violence, we see that what is happening is that some moral presupposition is being imposed on people from without – and possibly simply from the aether – as if said people then had any duty or responsibility to act according to it. I, however, have consistently made the case, including in this collection of essays, that anarchy is a matter of “free spirits” and so of independence of specifically moral and intellectual kinds. It should there also be noted that this independence should fundamentally be of a political kind too. This is exactly the kind of independence the pirates I have discussed exemplified and modelled. Their “selfishness” is akin to a Stirnerite egoism of ownness which is why I have in fact used the philosophy of Stirner and the rhetoric of the Stirnerite anarchist, Renzo Novatore, to explain and contextualise pirates previously. It is, in my estimation, politically liberal others infected with philosophically Western notions of “human rights” and equality arbitrated in, by and through, authoritative political institutions who have regarded said “selfishness”, acting for yourself, as then out of bounds. In that, I think they put their political liberalism before anarchy’s liberty and freedom to choose who you will become and how you will act for yourself. As will have been seen, I imagine anarchy as social egoism rather than as social conformity.

Sadly, it appears that political liberalism, and the imagined progressive politics of the political left in the Western world, will always be against this strand of egoism at the heart of anarchy. Such people then become those ultimately walking a different, and in

anarchist eyes, coercive, path. But the fact remains that if anarchy is about “agency, autonomy and free association”, if it is about “self-organisation”, then all coercive politics, including the liberal and the progressive, must be seen for what they are: eventually coercive opponents. It is not the pirates here who are inauthentic anarchists, it is the liberals, the progressives and the leftists (who, frankly, proceed by means of different values). It is everyone who denies your agency and insists, by force, that you must live this way and not that way, under these circumstances and not those, who is not the specifically anarchist role model. So I fail to see how a pirate insistence on forming their own communities and living in order to preserve them (and them alone) is in any way inauthentic in anarchist terms. Rather, I think simply everyone should be copying them for I see this as a major organisational and relational basis of any anarchist polity. (Compare Stirner’s “union of egoists”.) As before, I would argue that there is no *outside* obligation on anyone to care about anybody else (much less a world or universal polity it is inherently unlikely is even very realistic) but that this is only something to which one can obligate themselves – if they so choose. It may turn out that there are very good reasons for this, and this is in no way a recommendation of misanthropy, but anarchy suggests that this can only ever be something for people to decide for themselves in a very and specifically anarchist understanding of “selfishness”.

It now remains for me to address “morality” and this is something I have addressed at great length before. In this case, however, it might be seen that, in fact, I have already laid out the major ethical stipulations of anarchy as I understand it. First, there is the biological predisposition to self-organisation in that life itself appears to be biologically self-organising. If I wanted to talk about “living according to nature” like a Cynic might then this self-organisatory character of life itself might be something I would immediately bring up. This might then be seen to mandate, if not authorise, the “independence” I find



at the heart of the anarchist ethos which, in turn, leads to values of agency, autonomy and freedom of association (also called voluntary association). This leads to a distinction I have made before between “morality”, which I perceive as a moral metanarrative imagined generally applicable to all whether they like it or not, and “ethics” which I imagine as more personal, and personally constructed, things perhaps developed consensually in tandem with others. For the record, I do not believe that morality as an obligating metanarrative or ontological reality actually exists and I do believe that “anarchy” would and does stand as the implicit refusal of any such thing. This honours the notion, which I have already previously expressed, that, in anarchy, one can only obligate oneself. Obligation from without is coercion and potential authoritarianism.

On these grounds, neither the anarchist, nor anybody else, can criticise the pirate on the basis of “morality” (which is a spook or phantom) but only on the basis that they do something they would wish that they did not do (for which they may, or may not, have good, convincing or otherwise justifiable reasons). One wonders, however, why anyone has an obligation to do or not do something because someone else thinks they should? This may be something they take into consideration, as is the consequences of everything they do if they are smart, but it should always be them, as independent, self-organising beings, who do this. That is my idea of anarchist morality: collections and concatenations of personal ethics which become joined up in and through voluntaristic and always revocable social relations. The pirates, for example, formed and followed communally created articles of association which would define and arbitrate their polity. They did this together, by mutual agreement, and if they came to a point at which they didn’t like it any more then they left, subject to the commitments they had already made and fulfilled. This, in my estimation, is an actual example of the ethics I put in place of a general morality or external moral obligation. In anarchy, so I assert, all the obligations are

internally generated, simply put, as an aspect of an ethical impetus to independence which is itself thought ethical (as well as socially and politically beneficial). So there are no general morals. There is nothing you cannot do, or should do, in the abstract. Everything is situational, practical and arbitrated by some person, or persons, by means of their own independent reason, ethics and responsibility with their own agency and autonomy. Anarchist morality is the ethics of self-responsibility. Again, so I claim, the pirates are spot on with this for they make their own customs and traditions and follow their own understandings of how their polity should be. This, in my mind, is authentic anarchy. Anarchy as self-organisation.

This, then, is my brief case for anarchy restated and for the pirates of the Golden Age as legitimate representatives of it. It does not cover up their unsavoury and radically libertarian nature or their sometimes brutally violent lifestyle. Rather, it seeks to contextualise it as exactly anarchy where that anarchy is precisely not what has today become regarded as a morality-soaked, equality-seeking, rights-regarding, modern leftist or liberal politics. Anarchy, so I suggest, is both radical freedom (not least from exactly “morality” – there are no “good guys” and “bad guys” but just “guys”) but also radical responsibility. It is a political self-understanding which puts the human being at the heart of every decision to do with their life and makes it, and all relationships they may entertain, their responsibility too. Said anarchy is fundamentally anti-authoritarian and consequently opposed to all centralising power, whether oppressive or imagined benevolent. In an incarcerating world, it is the impetus to perhaps violent, and certainly outlaw, resistance and the necessity for attack as a means of defence and survival. Anarchy, however, mandates nothing – but neither does it forbid anything. It says only: do what thou wilt, the consequences are all yours! A merry life and a short one? So be it!

## Afterword: Postanarchy and Free Spirits

The herald of FREE SPIRITS is Friedrich Nietzsche and this phrase first gets an airing in his books in one of his *Untimely Meditations* – “Schopenhauer as Educator” – where he refers to “the free spirits and those who suffer profoundly from our age”. This is also related to those who have “recognized the unreason in the nature of this age”. Yet it is with his third book *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (this book was originally to be titled simply “The Free Spirit”) that Nietzsche begins to properly make something out of this terminology and give it meaning. So it is with this text that I will start working through the books of the Nietzschean canon in order to exegete what Nietzsche means by a “free spirit” so that I can later make the term of use in my anarchist and piratical context in this collection of essays.

A first clue here is found in the later preface to *Human, All Too Human*, added in the spring of 1886 to the book first published in 1878, in which Nietzsche now deigns to add a word or two specifically about free spirits. (Originally, there had been a short quotation from Descartes instead.) Nietzsche tells us here that he invented “free spirits” as companions to keep him in good spirits “as brave companions and familiars” through trying personal times. (Nietzsche had recently ended a close friendship with Richard Wagner, spiritual, artistic and intellectual - so close that Nietzsche actually had his own room in the Wagner house - and had had to leave his academic post due to debilitating bouts of illness which would eventually end his career.) These free spirits take on a life of their own, however, and he begins to see them as “active and audacious fellows” among the sons of Europe’s tomorrow, fellows he wishes to further speed into existence in his telling of them. First of all, then, a free spirit is one who experiences a “great liberation”

from previously experienced fetters of reverence to duties or traditions that had once held them fast, and from obligations that were thus imagined as a result. Here:

*"The great liberation comes for those who are thus fettered suddenly, like the shock of an earthquake: the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away - it itself does not know what is happening. A drive and impulse rules and masters it like a command; a will and desire awakens to go off, anywhere, at any cost; a vehement dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames and flickers in all its senses.*

*'Better to die than to go on living here' - thus responds the imperious voice and temptation: and this 'here', this 'at home' is everything it had hitherto loved! A sudden terror and suspicion of what it loved, a lightning-bolt of contempt for what it called 'duty', a rebellious, arbitrary, volcanically erupting desire for travel, strange places, estrangements, coldness, soberness, frost, a hatred of love, perhaps a desecrating blow and glance backwards to where it formerly loved and worshipped, perhaps a hot blush of shame at what it has just done and at the same time an exultation that it has done it, a drunken, inwardly exultant shudder which betrays that a victory has been won – a victory? over what? over whom? an enigmatic, question-packed, questionable victory, but the first victory nonetheless: such bad and painful things are part of the history of the great liberation. It is at the same time a sickness that can destroy the man who has it, this first outbreak of strength and will to self-determination, to evaluating on one's own account, this will to free will: and how much sickness is expressed in the wild experiments and singularities through which the liberated prisoner now seeks to demonstrate his mastery over things! He prowls cruelly around with an unslaked lasciviousness; what he captures has to expiate the perilous tension of his pride; what excites him he tears apart. With a wicked laugh he turns round whatever he finds veiled and through some sense of shame or other spared and pampered: he puts to the test*

*what these things look like when they are reversed. It is an act of willfulness, and pleasure in willfulness, if now he perhaps bestows his favour on that which has hitherto had a bad reputation - if, full of inquisitiveness and the desire to tempt and experiment, he creeps around the things most forbidden. Behind all his toiling and weaving - for he is restlessly and aimlessly on his way as if in a desert - stands the question mark of a more and more perilous curiosity. 'Can all values not be turned round? and is good perhaps evil? and God only an invention and finesse of the Devil? Is everything perhaps in the last resort false? And if we are deceived, are we not for that very reason also deceivers? Must we not be deceivers?' - such thoughts as these tempt him and lead him on, even further away, even further down. Solitude encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening, that terrible goddess and mater saeva cupidorum [wild mother of the passions] - but who today knows what solitude is?*

*From this morbid isolation, from the desert of these years of temptation and experiment, it is still a long road to that tremendous overflowing certainty and health which may not dispense even with wickedness, as a means and fish-hook of knowledge, to that mature freedom of spirit which is equally self-mastery and discipline of the heart and permits access to many and contradictory modes of thought - to that inner spaciousness and indulgence of superabundance which excludes the danger that the spirit may even on its own road perhaps lose itself and become infatuated and remain seated intoxicated in some corner or other, to that superfluity of formative, curative, moulding and restorative forces which is precisely the sign of great health, that superfluity which grants to the free spirit the dangerous privilege of living experimentally and of being allowed to offer itself to adventure: the master's privilege of the free spirit! In between there may lie long years of convalescence, years full of variegated, painfully magical transformations ruled and led along by a tenacious will to health which often ventures to clothe and disguise itself as*

*health already achieved. There is a midway condition which a man of such a destiny will not be able to recall without emotion: it is characterized by a pale, subtle happiness of light and sunshine, a feeling of bird-like freedom, bird-like altitude, bird-like exuberance, and a third thing in which curiosity is united with a tender contempt. A 'free-spirit'- this cool expression does one good in every condition, it is almost warming. One lives no longer in the fetters of love and hatred, without yes, without no, near or far as one wishes, preferably slipping away, evading, fluttering off, gone again, again flying aloft; one is spoiled, as everyone is who has at some time seen a tremendous number of things beneath him- and one becomes the opposite of those who concern themselves with things which have nothing to do with them. Indeed, the free spirit henceforth has to do only with things - and how many things! - with which he is no longer concerned . . ."*

Here, of course, is rhetoric - but it is a rhetoric of a freedom which one wills, a freedom cast as a will to health, a will to live experimentally, no longer content to rest on the laurels of someone else's truth. There is something of the desert about this freedom which is tied to being driven on by oneself to one's own knowledge, one's own mastery of self. This is a finding oneself which leads one to question everything, to pledge to oneself that nothing will count unless it is won by your own honesty and self-determination. It will undoubtedly lead to solitude – but one must also prove oneself strong enough for that as well. And so:

*"At that time it may finally happen that, under the sudden illumination of a still stressful, still changeable health, the free, ever freer spirit begins to unveil the riddle of that great liberation which had until then waited dark, questionable, almost untouchable in his memory. If he has for long hardly dared to ask himself: 'why so apart? so alone? renouncing everything I once revered? renouncing reverence itself? why this hardness, this*

*suspiciousness, this hatred for your own virtues?' - now he dares to ask it aloud and hears in reply something like an answer. 'You shall become master over yourself, master also over your virtues. Formerly they were your masters; but they must be only your instruments beside other instruments. You shall get control over your For and Against and learn how to display first one and then the other in accordance with your higher goal. You shall learn to grasp the sense of perspective in every value judgement - the displacement, distortion and merely apparent teleology of horizons and whatever else pertains to perspectivism; also the quantum of stupidity that resides in antitheses of values and the whole intellectual loss which every For, every Against costs us. You shall learn to grasp the necessary injustice in every For and Against, injustice as inseparable from life, life itself as conditioned by the sense of perspective and its injustice. You shall above all see with your own eyes where injustice is always at its greatest: where life has developed at its smallest, narrowest, neediest, most incipient and yet cannot avoid taking itself as the goal and measure of things and for the sake of its own preservation secretly and meanly and ceaselessly crumbling away and calling into question the higher, greater, richer - you shall see with your own eyes the problem of order of rank, and how power and right and spaciousness of perspective grow into the heights together. You shall' - enough: from now on the free spirit knows what 'you shall' he has obeyed, and he also knows what he now can, what only now he - may do . . ."*

This is a will to one's independence, to one's excellence (virtue, in Greek historical derivation, is a matter of excellence in being a human being), and is not just a personal but also a cultural task. Thus, in section 225 of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche says: "He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him." The free spirit, that is, sets themselves apart; they are

an exception. Such people set themselves on a course and go on a journey, as Nietzsche calls it in section 292, “the path of wisdom” which they embark upon “with a bold step and full of confidence” in which they are to “serve as [their] own source of experience”. In his final aphorism of the original book [638] Nietzsche calls free spirits “wanderers and philosophers” and they seek a transfiguration as of morning that transfigures the night. It is worth noting here that *Human, All Too Human* marks an intellectual turning point for Nietzsche in which he turns away from former beliefs and things which, as he himself intimates, fettered him, and strikes out on his own, determined to win the right to his own knowledge of things. This is the Nietzsche who will be willed into existence for the next 10 years of his life and which leads to Zarathustra, the Overhuman and the transvaluation of all values. Thus, this book is, as Nietzsche describes, the beginnings of a self-administered intellectual cure and the identification of growing spiritual/intellectual health with such a thing. In this connection, it is worth repeating once more that the German word “Geist” means ‘spirit’ yet also ‘mind’ and ‘intellect’. The word Nietzsche uses for “free spirit” is “freigeist” and in German that can mean “free thinker” just as much as “free spirit”. In fact, Nietzsche often plays on that fact.

That the free spirit is a cultural task Nietzsche starts to betray in “Assorted Opinions and Maxims”, added as a second part to *Human, All Too Human* in 1879. Nietzsche had already in what I have quoted linked “free spirits” with Europe and Europeans and he does so again in aphorism 87 here where he sees Europe playing a cultural role in world terms (yet as the antithesis of nationalism!). Here “all free spirits” are put alongside “all good Europeans”, something that happens in several places throughout his books as well. Then again in aphorism 182 (“signs of cultural weather”) Nietzsche says: “To test whether someone is one of us or not - I mean whether he is a free spirit or not – one should test his feelings towards Christianity. If he stands towards it in any way other than critically then



we turn our back on him: he is going to bring us impure air and bad weather.” To be a critic of Christianity, of course, will become one of Nietzsche’s most consistent tasks and here that is a marker of the free spirit, a cultural task to which they are called. Nietzsche expands upon this further in a key section (347), for our purposes, from the slightly later book *The Gay Science* in which he parses the difference between the believer who wants to be commanded and the free spirit:

*“Believers and their need to believe. - The extent to which one needs a faith in order to flourish, how much that is 'firm' and that one does not want shaken because one clings to it - that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to speak more clearly, one's weakness). Christianity, it seems to me, is still needed by most people in old Europe even today; hence it still finds believers. For that is how man is: an article of faith could be refuted to him a thousand times; as long as he needed it, he would consider it 'true' again and again, in accordance with that famous 'proof of strength' of which the Bible speaks. Metaphysics is still needed by some, but so is that impetuous demand for certainty that today discharges itself in scientific-positivistic form among great masses – the demand that one wants by all means something to be firm (while owing to the fervour of this demand one treats the demonstration of this certainty more lightly and negligently): this is still the demand for foothold, support - in short, the instinct of weakness that, to be sure, does not create sundry religions, forms of metaphysics, and convictions but does - preserve them. Indeed, around all these positivistic systems hover the fumes of a certain pessimistic gloom, something of a weariness, fatalism, disappointment, fear of new disappointment – or else self-dramatizing rage, a bad mood, the anarchism of exasperation and whatever other symptoms or masquerades there are of the feeling of weakness. Even the vehemence with which our cleverest contemporaries get lost in pitiful nooks and crevices such as patriotism (I refer to what the French call chauvinisme and the Germans 'German'), or in petty*

*aesthetic creeds such as French naturalism (which enhances and exposes only the part of nature that simultaneously disgusts and amazes – today one likes to call it la verite vraie - ), or in Petersburg-style nihilism (meaning faith in unbelief to the point of martyrdom), always indicates primarily the need for faith, a foothold, backbone, support ... Faith is always most desired and most urgently needed where will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive mark of sovereignty and strength. That is, the less someone knows how to command, the more urgently does he desire someone who commands, who commands severely - a god, prince, the social order, doctor, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience. From this one might gather that both world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, may have owed their origin and especially their sudden spread to a tremendous sickening of the will. And that is actually what happened: both religions encountered a demand for a 'Thou Shalt' that, through a sickening of the will, had increased to an absurd level and bordered on desperation; both religions were teachers of fanaticism in times of a slackening of the will and thereby offered innumerable people support, a new possibility of willing, a delight in willing. For fanaticism is the only 'strength of the will' that even the weak and insecure can be brought to attain, as a type of hypnosis of the entire sensual-intellectual system to the benefit of the excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling which is now dominant - the Christian calls it his faith. Once a human being arrives at the basic conviction that he must be commanded, he becomes 'a believer'; conversely, one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination, a freedom of the will, in which the spirit takes leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, practised as it is in maintaining itself on light ropes and possibilities and dancing even beside abysses. Such a spirit would be the free spirit par excellence."*

Free spirits, then, are NOT believers any more than they are those who want to be commanded. Indeed, free spirits, as of their nature, are those with an unsurpressable

desire to command themselves, to rule themselves, to create their own "I shall", to dance (compare Emma Goldman's most famous credited aphorism) even beside abysses. This is an egoistic place of self-command but also something of cultural significance where to be a believer, to be commanded, to be "Christian", is a phenomenon which manifests itself in society at large. A society of free spirits would be a society of the self-determined, the self-actualised, the self creative and self-organising, and not a society of willing believers. "Free spirits" is used in such a connection, in fact, earlier in section 343 of *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche, reflecting on "the death of God" which his madman had announced, lantern in hand, in the marketplace in section 125, reflects on a future context for this and lends it a glimmer of utopian light:

*"How to understand our cheerfulness. - The greatest recent event – that 'God is dead'; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable - is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe. To those few at least whose eyes - or the suspicion in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some kind of sun seems to have set; some old deep trust turned into doubt: to them, our world must appear more autumnal, more mistrustful, stranger, 'older'. But in the main one might say: for many people's power of comprehension, the event is itself far too great, distant, and out of the way even for its tidings to be thought of as having arrived yet. Even less may one suppose many to know at all what this event really means - and, now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it - for example, our entire European morality. This long, dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead: who would guess enough of it today to play the teacher and herald of this monstrous logic of horror, the prophet of deep darkness and an eclipse of the sun the like of which has probably never before existed on earth? Even we born guessers of riddles who are so to speak on a lookout at the top of the*

*mountain, posted between today and tomorrow and stretched in the contradiction between today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the next century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really should have become apparent by now - why is it that even we look forward to this darkening without any genuine involvement and above all without worry and fear for ourselves? Are we perhaps still not too influenced by the most immediate consequences of this event - and these immediate consequences, the consequences for ourselves, are the opposite of what one might expect - not at all sad and gloomy, but much more like a new and barely describable type of light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn . . . Indeed, at hearing the news that 'the old god is dead', we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation - finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea'."*

We see here that talk of "free spirits" is more than the former personal need for companion spirits which Nietzsche had when writing *Human, All Too Human*. The idea has now become part of an intellectual, moral, political and cultural critique (encompassing the books *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science*) where free spirits have a role to play in the future of Europe and the world, a role to do with values and culture. The title of this book, *The Gay Science* ["gay" as in "cheerful" or joyful" - which are both good alternatives], is, in fact, itself a cultural reference of Nietzsche's to a mentality ascribed to one the epitome of whom is "the specific unity of 'singer, knight, and free spirit' which was characteristic of early Provençal culture." The free spirit is, then, a cultural figure.

It should be no surprise, then, that the ultimate free spirit is Zarathustra, into whom the free spirit metamorphosises as an act of self-overcoming. Already, near the beginning of his many speeches, Zarathustra proclaims that "I love him who is of a free spirit and a free heart" (recalling the multivalent nature of "Geist") and this, of course, will lead to the Overhuman which is also a free spirit. Thus, as Zarathustra pronounces in the section entitled "Of the Famous Philosophers", "But he who is hated by the people as a wolf is by the dogs: he is the free spirit, the enemy of fetters, the non-worshipper, the dweller in forests." Such people must "break their will to venerate" in order to establish their own "genuineness". But then, once more, Nietzsche links free spirits with the desert when he says:

*"Genuine – that is what I call him who goes into godforsaken deserts and has broken his venerating heart. In the yellow sand and burned by the sun, perhaps he blinks thirstily at the islands filled with springs where living creatures rest beneath shady trees. But his thirst does not persuade him to become like these comfortable creatures: for where there are oases there are also idols. Hungered, violent, solitary, godless: that is how the lion-will wants to be. Free from the happiness of serfs, redeemed from gods and worship, fearless and fearful, great and solitary: that is how the will of the genuine man is. The genuine men, the free spirits, have always dwelt in the desert, as the lords of the desert; but in the towns dwell the well-fed famous philosophers – the draught animals."*

It seems clear that the free spirit is without gods - but they are also without the desire to venerate or show reverence. These things they have cultivated out of themselves as matters of health and strength. Free spirits have nothing to worship and they have lost even the desire to worship. Instead they are "free spirits and wanderers" who must ever overcome themselves and their culture as constant revivifying springs of new life and

new growth. In that, the pre-eminent Nietzschean symbol is the dance. Elsewhere in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche says “none of you has learned to dance as a man ought to dance – to dance beyond yourselves!” - and that is what the free spirit must learn to do.

Nietzsche's next book after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was *Beyond Good and Evil*, an appropriate title for the free spirit that denominates where such a person resides – for how can the free spirit, who determines themselves, NOT reside there? The second part of this book is, in fact, titled “The Free Spirit” and so it seems that Nietzsche made this connection for himself too. Here we find a spirit of speculation and suspicion entirely appropriate to the free spirit who has chosen to live experimentally in search of their own knowledge and truth whilst entirely aware of the question “Why should the world that is relevant to us not be a fiction?” Such a free spirit is coming to the point of questioning the very language and grammar in which all their thought is, and must be, put and to realising that “it cannot matter in the least whether precisely you are in the right”. This is because such a free spirit realises that “a more praiseworthy veracity may lie in every little question mark placed after your favourite words and favourite theories (and occasionally after yourselves).” The free spirits and, as Nietzsche also denominates them in this second part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, “philosophers of the future”, are skeptics who must test everything for themselves; they have made themselves so responsible and cultivated an honesty within themselves for this task. Such free-spirited philosophers of the future are once more expressly named as “experimenters” and so are those who are driven not by the past knowledge of others but by that knowledge they acquire in and through their own lives and experiences. But:

*“Are they new friends of 'truth', these approaching philosophers? Probably so, for until now all philosophers have loved their truths. But it is certain that they will not be dogmatists. It*

*would surely go against their pride, and also against their good taste, if their truth had to be a truth for everyone else, too - this has been the secret wish and ulterior thought in all earlier dogmatic endeavours. 'My judgement is my judgement: no one else has a right to it so easily', as a philosopher of the future might say. We have to rid ourselves of the bad taste of wanting to agree with many others. 'Good' is no longer good if our neighbour takes the word into his mouth. So how could there possibly be 'common goods'? The term contradicts itself: anything that is common never has much value. In the end things will have to be as they are and always have been: the great things are left to the great, the abysses to the profound, tenderness and thrills to the sensitive, and to sum it up in a few words, everything extraordinary to the extraordinary."*

Here Nietzsche puts a higher value on the personally acquired truth than on the truth of the majority, the latter a thing, in his mind, of bad taste. Each must think for themselves in this philosophy of the future. Only this builds health. It is a personal, but also fundamentally cultural, prescription when extrapolated from person to person in networks of relationships. This is brought out further in the final note of the free spirit chapter in section 44:

*"After all that has been said, must I still make a special point of mentioning that they too will be free, very free spirits, these philosophers of the future - just as surely as they will not be free spirits merely, but something more, higher, greater, and fundamentally different, something that would not go unrecognized or misidentified? But in saying this, I feel even towards them (as towards ourselves, the free spirits who are their heralds and forerunners!) the obligation to dispel for both of us a stupid old prejudice and misunderstanding that for all too long has enshrouded the concept 'free spirit' like a fog. In all the countries of Europe, and in America now as well, there is something that is misusing this name: a very narrow,*

*trapped, enchained sort of spirit who wants more or less the opposite of what we do, by instinct and intention - not to mention that they are bound to be the shut windows and barred doors to those approaching new philosophers. These falsely dubbed 'free spirits' belong, short and sour, to the levellers, loquacious scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas'; they are all of them people without solitude, without their own solitude, plain well-behaved lads whose courage and honourable propriety cannot be denied. It is just that they are unfree and laughably superficial, especially in light of their basic tendency to see, more or less, the cause of all human misery and failure in the structures of society up to now, thus happily managing to turn truth upside down! What they are trying with all their strength to achieve is a common green pasture of happiness for the herd, with safety, security, comfort, ease of life for everyone; their two most often recited tunes and teachings are 'Equal rights' and 'Compassion for all suffering' - and they take suffering itself as something that must be eliminated.*

*We who are the opposite, who have opened an eye and a conscience to the question of where and how the plant 'human being' has most vigorously grown tall, we are of the opinion that this has always happened under the opposite conditions: that the precariousness of the plant's situation had first to increase enormously; that its power of invention and disguise (its 'spirit'-) had to become subtle and daring through long periods of pressure and discipline; that its life-will had to be intensified into an unconditional power-will. We are of the opinion that harshness, violence, enslavement, danger on the street and in the heart, seclusion, stoicism, the art of the tempter and every kind of devilry, that everything evil, frightful, tyrannical, predatory, and snake-like about humans serves to heighten the species 'human being' as much as does its opposite. To say only this much, in fact, is not even saying enough, and whether we speak or are silent at this juncture, we find ourselves at the other end of all modern ideology and wishful thinking of the herd: as their*



*antipodes, perhaps? Is it any surprise that we 'free spirits' are not the most communicative of spirits? That we do not wish to reveal in every case what a spirit can liberate itself from and what it may then perhaps be driven to? And as far as concerns the dangerous phrase 'beyond good and evil', it guards us at least against being misidentified: we are something other than 'libre-penseurs', 'liberi pensatori', 'freethinkers', and whatever other names all these honourable advocates of 'modern ideas' might choose to call themselves by. Having been at home, or at least a guest in many countries of the spirit; having again and again escaped the pleasant, overstuffed nooks to which our special loves and hatreds, our youth, our origins, the accidents of people and books, or even the weariness of the journey have seemed to banish us; full of malice towards the temptations of dependence that lie hidden in honours or money or position or the enthusiasms of the senses; grateful in fact for distress and varying illnesses, because they have always freed us from some rule and its 'prejudice'; grateful to god, devil, sheep, and worm in us, curious to the point of vice, investigators to the point of cruelty, thoughtlessly fingering what cannot be grasped, with teeth and stomach for what is most indigestible, ready for any craft that demands sharp wits and sharp senses, ready for every venture thanks to a surplus of 'free will', with fore-souls and back-souls whose ultimate intentions no one can easily penetrate, with foregrounds and backgrounds that no foot could traverse to the end, secluded under the cloaks of light, conquerors despite our resemblance to heirs and wastrels, organizers and collectors from morn till night, misers of our wealth and of our overflowing desk-drawers, economical in learning and forgetting, inventive in schemata, sometimes proud of category tables, sometimes pedants, sometimes labouring night-owls even in bright daylight; and yes, if necessary, even scarecrows - and that is what is necessary today, in so far as we are the born, sworn jealous friends of solitude, our own, deepest, most midnight, midday solitude. That is the sort of human we are, we free spirits! And perhaps you have something of it, too, you who are approaching? You new philosophers? -"*

To be sure this is a long “aphorism” that is, in addition, plugged into Nietzsche’s wider cultural critique yet the sense of it, for the free spirit, is that the free spirit is not, as Nietzsche called all those of his day in whom he found a sense for “democracy” or “equality” (which included “anarchists”), a “leveller”. Nietzsche, to keep things simple, found this idea of levelling or an abstracted imbued equality or democracy fundamentally unhealthy at a cultural level; it literally, in his mind, did not promote strength or health and so, regardless of moral judgments (which he wouldn’t have agreed with either), was regarded as a materially bad thing which could only lead (and was leading) to societal decay. Thus, whether you think democracy or equality are good things or not, Nietzsche argues that they are bad for the social organism as matters of inevitable material fact when using a self-organising, biological metaphor of life, health and growth. What is not, however, is the free spirit who is independent of mind and who has hardened themselves to survive in the desert, a person of free will not afraid of the solitude which comes from one’s own truth and one’s own hard won knowledge verified by personal experience. For such a person, suffering is not to be valued simply as “bad” and eradicated at all costs and in every case. For such a one, suffering, too, has its uses if it befalls us; it can even be necessary. The free spirit, such as Nietzsche regards himself to be, thinks in terms of health and cleanliness, that which promotes life, before they acquiesce before the slightest test or hardship as if the point of life was to avoid them all. For the free spirit, that which promotes one’s own strength is good and that which encourages weakness is detrimental. The free spirit thinks in terms of breeding and favours that which strengthens rather than that which weakens. (I think here of Diogenes rolling in hot sand in summer to steel himself to the heat or clinging to cold statues in winter to steel himself against the cold.) It is in this sense that Emma Goldman can praise Nietzsche as one who wants to make aristocrats of us all rather than “a race of weaklings”. To put

words in Emma Goldman's mouth, in fact, in saying this, she really wants a community of free spirits as Nietzsche did too.

The characterisation of the free spirit is further commented upon by Nietzsche in the 24th section of the third essay of *On The Genealogy of Morality*. Here, once more, Nietzsche wants to emphasise that free spirits are not any kind of believers:

*"We 'knowers' are positively mistrustful of any kind of believers; our mistrust has gradually trained us to conclude the opposite to what was formerly concluded: namely, to presuppose, wherever the strength of a belief becomes prominent, a certain weakness, even improbability of proof. Even we do not deny that faith 'brings salvation': precisely for that reason we deny that faith proves anything, – a strong faith which brings salvation is grounds for suspicion of the object of its faith, it does not establish truth, it establishes a certain probability – of deception. What now is the position in this case? – These 'no'-sayers and outsiders of today, those who are absolute in one thing, their demand for intellectual rigour [Sauberkeit – which literally means "cleanliness"], these hard, strict, abstinent, heroic minds who make up the glory of our time, all these pale atheists, Antichrists, immoralists, nihilists, these sceptics, ephectics, hectics of the mind [that is, of the Geist] (they are one and all the latter in a certain sense), these last idealists of knowledge in whom, alone, intellectual conscience dwells and is embodied these days, – they believe they are all as liberated as possible from the ascetic ideal, these 'free, very free spirits': and yet, I will tell them what they themselves cannot see – because they are standing too close to themselves – this ideal is quite simply their ideal as well, they themselves represent it nowadays, and perhaps no one else, they themselves are its most intellectualized product, its most advanced front-line troops and scouts, its most insidious, delicate and elusive form of seduction: – if I am at all able to solve riddles, I wish to claim to do so with this*

*pronouncement! . . . These are very far from being free spirits: because they still believe in truth . . . "*

The free spirit is a person of intellectual rigour who requires the courage, honesty and authenticity for what they know – and, just as importantly, for what they don't know. Note that Nietzsche links this to a need for an intellectual cleanliness which may demand saying "No" to society's highest truths and most revered ideas. The free spirit must be the "immoralist" and "nihilist" who pays that no attention if their own intellectual rigour denies it. They must be fully independent intellectual entities. What is at stake here, as Nietzsche explains in section 203 of *Beyond Good and Evil* – referenced in *On The Genealogy of Morality* – is nothing less than "the total degeneration of man". It is, once again, this question of what makes for strength and health, the "levelling" and "equality" of "Socialists" or the creed of free spirits:

*"We who are of another faith –, we, to whom the democratic movement counts not just as a form of decay of political organization but as the form of decay, namely diminution, of man, as a way of levelling him down and lowering his value: where must we reach out with our hopes? – To new philosophers, there is no alternative; to spirits strong enough and primordially forceful enough to give an incentive for contrary valuations and for 'eternal values' to be valued another way round, turned another way round; to those sent on ahead, to men of the future who, in the present, tie up the knot of compulsion which forces the will of millennia on to new paths. To teach man that the future of mankind is his will, dependent on a human will, and to prepare him for great deeds of daring and comprehensive attempts at discipline and breeding, in order to put an end to that terrible domination of folly and accident hitherto known as 'history' – the folly of the 'greatest number' is just its final form –: for this, some time or other, a new type of philosopher and*

*commander will be necessary, in comparison to whose image everything we have seen on earth by way of hidden, terrible and benevolent spirits will seem pale and dwarfed. It is the image of such leaders which floats before our eyes: – dare I say it out loud, you free spirits? The circumstances which one must partly create and partly take advantage of to bring this about; the probable ways and experiments by means of which a soul would grow to such height and power in order to feel the compulsion to these tasks; a transvaluation of values under the new pressure and hammer of which a conscience is steeled, a heart turned to iron, so that it can bear the weight of such a responsibility; on the other hand, the necessity of such leaders, the appalling danger that they might not materialize or that they might turn out badly or degenerate – these are our real worries and anxieties, you know, don't you, you free spirits? These are the heavy distant thoughts and thunderstorms that pass over the firmament of our life. There are few pains as deep as that of having seen, recognized and sympathized with an extraordinary man who has strayed from his path and degenerated: whoever has the rare eye for the absolute danger of 'man' himself degenerating, whoever, like us, has recognized the incredible contingency which has played its game with regard to the future of men – a game in which no hand participated, not even 'God's finger'! – whoever guesses at the calamity which lies concealed in the stupid naïvety and blind trust of 'modern ideas', still more in the whole Christian-European morality: he suffers from an anxiety which cannot be compared with any other, – he sees with one glance what, under a favourable accumulation and increase in forces and tasks could still be bred from man, he knows, with all the knowledge of his conscience, how man is still untapped for the greatest possibilities and how often the species, man, has already stood confronted with mysterious decisions and new paths: – he knows even better from his own painful memory what pathetic things have so far habitually shattered, snapped, sunk and made wretched an embryonic being of the highest potential. The total degeneration of man right down to what appears today, to socialist idiots and numbskulls, as their 'man of the*

*future' – as their ideal! – this degeneration and diminution of man to the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, to the man in a 'free society'), this bestialization of man into a dwarf animal of equal rights and claims is possible, there is no doubt! Whoever has once thought these possibilities through to the end knows one form of nausea more than other people do – and perhaps also a new task! . . ."*

With this text Nietzsche introduces the idea of values and the need for them to be transvalued if humankind would be a healthy species. Nietzsche refutes the idea that "equal rights" leads to a healthy humanity – perhaps not least because this very idea is entirely contrary to that of the free spirits he has heretofore imagined at length. Nietzsche stands for that person who, by act of will, is constantly questioning everything – not least themselves! - in order to overcome themselves. He believes that the strongest humanity is that which is made up of the strongest, most healthy, human beings, a self-organising act and achievement. This "health" is not, of course, meant in a naively medical sense; it is a metaphor and only a metaphor. Nietzsche is about asking what makes human beings vital and alive, what promotes their growth. His answer is a full intellectual, moral and cultural independence which can only lead to political independence as well. For Nietzsche, free spirits create their own values and change old values into new ones so that they totally recreate themselves on their own terms (so also Zarathustra). The sense of this is brought out, in fact, in section 13 of *The Anti-Christ*:

*"Let us not underestimate the fact that we ourselves, we free spirits, already constitute a 'revaluation of all values', a living declaration of war on and victory over all old concepts of 'true' and 'untrue'. The most valuable insights are the last to be discovered; but methods are the most valuable insights. All the methods, all the presuppositions of our present scientific spirit have been regarded with the greatest contempt for thousands of years, they barred*

*certain people from the company of 'decent' men, - these people were considered 'enemies of God', despisers of the truth, or 'possessed'. As scientific characters, they were Chandala [untouchables]. We have had the whole pathos of humanity against us - its idea of what truth should be, of what serving the truth should entail: so far, every 'thou shalt' has been directed against us . . . Our objectives, our practices, our silent, cautious, distrustful nature - all of this seemed totally unworthy and despicable. - In the end, and in all fairness, people should ask themselves whether it was not really an aesthetic taste that kept humanity in the dark for so long: people demanded a picturesque effect from the truth, they demanded that the knower make a striking impression on their senses. Our modesty is what offended their taste for the longest time . . . And didn't they know it, these strutting turkey-cocks of God - "*

Of course, in *The Anti-Christ* the target is the Christian with their belief. But Nietzsche is not thereby afraid to say that "Jesus could be called a 'free spirit', using the phrase somewhat loosely" (section 32) – and that because, in his analysis of the Galilean:

*"The concept, the experience of 'life' as only he knew it, repelled every type of word, formula, law, faith, or dogma. He spoke only about what was inside him most deeply: 'life' or 'truth' or 'light' are his words for the innermost, - he saw everything else, the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself, as having value only as a sign, a parable."*

We will remember from earlier that the free spirit was not, and could not, ever be a dogmatist. Nietzsche thinks that Jesus was no dogmatist either. In giving his own truth, he demonstrated a kind of free spiritedness which even Nietzsche – the Anti-Christ! - could recognise. *The Anti-Christ* itself is a good, and short, book to read in regard to free spirits – yet not because it is all about them but because it is about their opposites, the

Christians and believers. It is here, in fact, that Nietzsche makes one of his most pertinent comments on intellectual integrity and the necessary intellectual qualities which can lead to a true intellectual independence. This is in section 54:

*"Make no mistake about it: great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic. The vigour, the freedom that comes from the strength and super-strength of spirit proves itself through scepticism. Where basic issues about value or lack of value are concerned, people with convictions do not come into consideration. Convictions are prisons. These people do not see far enough, they do not see beneath themselves: but if you are going to talk about value and lack of value, you need to see five hundred convictions beneath you, behind you . . . A spirit who wills greatness and also wills the means to it is necessarily a sceptic. The freedom from every sort of conviction, being able to see freely, is part of strength . . . His whole intellect is devoted to the great passion, the foundation and the power of its being, more enlightened, more despotic than he is himself; it gives him assurance; it gives him the courage even for unholy means; it allows him convictions under certain circumstances. Conviction as a means: there are many things that can be achieved only by means of a conviction. Great passion uses convictions and uses them up, it does not subordinate itself to them, - it knows its own sovereignty. - Conversely: the need for faith, for some unconditional yes or no... is a need of the weak. Men of faith, the 'faithful' of every type, are necessarily dependent people, - the sort of people who cannot posit themselves as a goal, who are utterly incapable of positing goals from out of themselves. The 'man of faith' does not belong to himself, he can only be a means, he needs to be used up, he needs someone to use him up. He instinctively holds a morality of self-abnegation in the greatest honour; everything urges him to adopt it, his shrewdness, experience, vanity. Every type of faith is an expression of self- abnegation, of self-alienation . . . Just think how the vast majority of people need some regulative guideline as an external principle of bondage or mooring, how*



*compulsion, slavery in a higher sense, is the only and ultimate condition for the thriving of the weak-willed person. . . this is how conviction, 'faith', should be understood as well. It gives the man of convictions a backbone. Not to see many things, not to be free on a single point, to be partisan through and through, to have a strict and necessary optic in all values - these are the only conditions under which this type of a person can even arise. But this makes him the opposite, the antagonist of the truthful person, - of truth . . . A faithful person is not free to have any sort of conscience for the question 'true' or 'untrue': honesty on this point would be his immediate downfall. People with convictions have pathologically conditioned optics, which makes them into fanatics - Savonarola, Luther, Rousseau, Robespierre, Saint-Simon, - the antithesis of strong spirits who have become free. But the grand poses struck by these sick spirits, these conceptual epileptics, can affect the great masses, - fanatics are picturesque, humanity would rather see gestures than listen to reasons . . ."*

This intellectual independence of the free spirit is then a matter of the strength of my own reasons - but where "reasons" are necessary things for the free spirit, things one must fashion for oneself. Freedom, in this sense, Nietzsche does not think is automatic or given. It is, and can only be, an achievement of the self, a self-organisation and self-organising act. One must make oneself a goal and use everything up in that endeavour – one consequently cannot afford the luxury of "convictions" for these must always be subservient to the creation and overcoming of one's past truths. "Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies" – as Nietzsche had said right back in that book "for free spirits" at section 483. It is right to say then, as Nietzsche does in *Ecce Homo* where he reviews *Human, All Too Human*, that "The term 'free spirit' does not want to be understood in any other way [than as] a spirit that has become free, that has taken hold of itself again." This is a matter of progress – towards oneself – progress towards one's

moral, intellectual, cultural and political independence. This, in fact, is what I think attracted Emma Goldman to Nietzsche so much and held her interest whilst others dissented - and then made it the basis of her own developing anarchy.

What then is “an anarchism of free spirits” in my own words? Lots of ideas suggest themselves and, since this is a text in which I am trying to explain things, it is a duty I impose upon myself to try and present them sensibly. Perhaps the deepest and most consequential of these ideas, since I must start somewhere, is that “an anarchism of free spirits is the only way to the achievement of something termed ‘anarchism’.” If that sounds strange and perhaps silly to you I can assure you that in my mind it is not. But why? First of all, because I’m not at all convinced that anarchists are about, or should be about, the achievement of “anarchism” or “world peace” or “revolution” or ridiculous macro-political pie-in-the-sky things like that. An anarchism of free spirits regards the proper focus of anarchistic attention as being yourself and willing yourself to be that free spirit which Nietzsche (and Renzo Novatore and, for that matter, Emma Goldman) have spoken to. At most, such a person is concerned with their relationships with others, with whom they combine in various ways, in order to satisfy each others needs. But “overthrowing the government” or “establishing an anarchist territory” or “organising the people”? A free spirit is not concerned with that as a goal and neither do they find that the way to any goal worth having.

The second point here is that – as Novatore demonstrated in a previous essay in this book – the free spirit takes words like “anarchism” and “anarchy” VERY SERIOUSLY and, as a consequence, accepts no half measures. If “anarchy” is “no leaders” or “no authority” then that must be followed through to the end and not fudged in “the anarchist revolutionary council” or “the benevolent federation of anarchists”. “Anarchy”, for the free spirit, means

no leaders or authorities or coercive bodies at all but autonomy, agency, free association, voluntary connections which people can break off, for any reason or none, at any time they like. If it be argued against this point that this would make any community or project of more than a few hours impossible since no one could ever be relied on, then I reply to that, even if it were so – and pirates obviously prove otherwise, then you must live with it. But I would also add that cultivating trusting relationships and finding people you can rely on should never be a matter of coercion or obligation either and ask whether introducing such things, even apparently benevolently, is really what you want. For the free spirit any community or project which requires cooperation must absolutely be based in free association and cultivating voluntary relationships in order to make something that comes from within rather than something which is coerced from without. The free spirit is one who is not shy of sharing themselves with others in their own, or in a shared, interest but it must always be freely given by they themselves in order to maintain its free-spirited character. This is a matter of taking anarchism seriously as an uncoerced path through life and of taking anarchy seriously as a state of existence in which coercions are things that life will always seek to avoid and to rebel against as a duty willingly self-imposed by the free and the liberty-loving.

The third point is then to say, perhaps as Auban says best in John Henry Mackay's semi-autobiographical fiction *The Anarchists* from the last decade of the nineteenth century, that metanarrative idealisms which ultimately seek only to propagate themselves – such as anarchist communism was accused of – are finally authoritarianism and coercion in another disguise – an imposition of benevolent order but still an imposition nevertheless. This is, at least, certainly a charge individualist anarchists made in the past and we saw in our discussion of Novatore in a previous essay that he essentially made the same charge against Carlo Molaschi in real life that Auban made against Trupp in *The Anarchists*. The

question to answer here is where does the centre of gravity lie when we talk about freedom? Is it with the collectivity or is it with the individual? The free spirit says that it is only individuals, with their real lives and felt needs and actual concerns, that actually exist and that the collectivity is often an abstraction that is wielded for various purposes only made real in what Stirner called “the union of egoists”.

This, however, is not to say that people may not have common needs or common foes or that relationships between people are also not real. It is to say that if people want to fight foes together or supply needs together then this is for them to agree upon in and from their own individuality through the construction of relationships each on their own terms – voluntarily and self-organisingly. What my interest is, whoever “me” is there, should always be a matter for me. I should always be responsible for it and want to be responsible for it. It should be regarded as something which cannot be given away or subsumed or superseded by any imagined “higher level” collective body, institution or abstraction. A free spirit simply would fight to the death against this as a struggle for their own independent existence – a matter, to them, *of* their life and death. How they live, and who they live it with, are matters for them and them alone and this is seen as taking “anarchism” seriously as an idea to begin with, as an idea that means something specific that cannot be fudged. Think of it, if you like, as the pirates discussed in previous essays in this book who chose which crew, if any crew, to join, and then associated with them on common, agreed upon, terms. These free agreements between them were, in distinction to the state navies from which many of them had deserted, matters of voluntarism rather than impressment. That, in fact, was their difference and what makes them so politically interesting to us now in contexts of freedom and liberation. It has anarchist precedent too in the contractualism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

Another aspect to this, then, already hinted at earlier on in previous discussion, is that anarchism must never be seen as gerrymandering the world. The more I have studied anarchism, past and present, the more it has often seemed to me that, for many, this is exactly what anarchism is. We see this attitude, for example, wherever we think of anarchism as a revolution which sweeps away capitalism or a government or as a future state of affairs where people are organised in a more horizontal way (uniformly things Nietzsche would have despised). The wish here is the same: to fix the world in a way some assumedly benevolent person or persons imagines is best. IS THAT REALLY ANARCHISM? IS THAT WHAT 'NO AUTHORITY' HAS AMOUNTED TO? IS 'ANARCHY' THEN A STATE OF AFFAIRS IN WHICH SOME IDEOLOGY HAS DECIDED HOW PEOPLE WILL LIVE? Excuse me, but I seem to have studied anarchism for years now and come to the conclusion that this is exactly what anarchism *was intended to make impossible!* What is anarchism? What is anarchy? Is it disseminating a new ideology which reorientates how people relate to one another and creates communities and societies? Is it, in this sense, 'gerrymandering the world'? For an anarchism of free spirits it could not be for each would wish their own independence and to create their relationships with one another as they saw fit – not according to that benevolent ideology which someone else thought was best for them. Again: do we take "anarchy" seriously? Do we take "anarchism" seriously? What does it mean to do this when you really get down to the filth and the gutter? It means no leaders; it means no authorities; it means "I take responsibility for myself, I educate myself, I create myself, I actualise myself, I organise myself – for my life is my business and I must live it as I please." Whether you like it or not. And if you resolve, with your comrades, to make me submit to your "anarchism", well then, you make an enemy of me as well! Be a pirate!

Now it is Max Stirner's recognition that "The idols exist through me; I need only refrain from creating them anew, then they exist no longer: 'higher powers' exist only through

my exalting them and abasing myself." As such, a further quotation of Max Stirner's from *The Unique and Its Property* puts this thought in broader terms:

*"Revolution and insurrection should not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in a radical change of conditions, of the prevailing condition or status, the state or society, and is therefore a political or social act; the latter indeed has a transformation of conditions as its inevitable result, but doesn't start from it, but from the discontent of human beings with themselves; it is not an armed uprising, but a rising up of individuals, a getting up, without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The revolution is aimed at new arrangements, while the insurrection leads us to no longer let ourselves be arranged, but rather to arrange ourselves, and sets no radiant hopes on 'institutions.'... The revolution commands one to make arrangements; the insurrection demands that one stand or raise himself up... The insurrectionist strives to become constitutionless."*

We have to take seriously, then, in this case, what Nietzsche meant by a free spirit. He meant someone creating, and asserting, their intellectual, moral, cultural and political independence or their Stirnerite "constitutionlessness", their refusal to be institutionalised. But in my using the word "independence" here let us not make facile allusions to someone living alone in self-absorbed isolation. This is not what is meant. It is much more to do with a person who owns themselves, who does not defer, who insists that their thoughts, their life, their behaviour, is a matter for them. They do not defer to custom or act according to tradition as unthinking meatpuppets being worked by the dead hand of the past that has animated them from birth through the maladministrations of parents, teachers, bosses and public morality. In simple terms, they think for themselves and, in doing so, they rebel against uniformity, duty, obligation, staying in your lane, knowing your place and doing as you are told. They are people who refuse to

be drilled and who insist on making their own meanings and creating their own values and value systems. *Such things they regard as the honesty and virtue of the free spirit.*

They are those who, even if everyone else goes along with things, will not be coerced. They insist on the voluntaristic nature of human conduct and on an anarchism based in voluntarism. They ask that, if anarchism and anarchy mean anything, they mean human agency, real autonomy and a total and absolute freedom of association - and they imagine that, these things being granted, the rest is not really our concern and will take care of itself for people do not need to be organised, they are quite capable of organising themselves if they feel the need to. One might even say that they, like all life, came biologically equipped for it as organisms of self-organisation.

The free spirit conceives that anarchism is not, as has often been the case in the past, a matter purely of externals. The *Mujeres Libres*, for example, knew that was not the case during the Spanish Revolution of the mid-1930s because they found that misogynistic attitudes were apparently undisturbed by the anarchists' practice of their anarchism. The free spirit regards anarchism as a matter of what is within, as a matter of character, personality, personal values, a fastidiously cleansed mind in which every last vestige of inherited thinking has been purged of old values. The free spirit is a Zarathustran who creates their own law tables and disciplines themselves to think afresh and for themselves. This, they imagine, is no easy win for thoughts, ideas and values are insidious and hard to see until they are exposed. The idea here is similar to a saying of Jesus from Luke's gospel which Renzo Novatore may have himself referenced earlier:

*"Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say "Look here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'"*

What is translated here from Greek as "among you" can also quite legitimately be rendered "within you" – and many modern bibles have a textual note from the translators to this effect. The importance of this translation is that Jesus then conceives of his "kingdom of God" as a spiritual thing, a matter of internals like values, beliefs, ideas, things which animate and motivate someone's life, their character. There are many other ancient texts which have Jesus making similar claims - although this is not really the time to go into it.

My point is that this applies to an anarchism of free spirits too for this is an internal thing and it is a belief which posits that no one could "change the world" – as anarchists have historically been imagined to want to do – UNLESS THEY WERE INTERNALLY OF A CONSTITUTION TO BE ABLE TO DO SO. My interpretation of Jesus, more fully discussed elsewhere, is of a person who wanted to create a community with new values that lived their historical Judaism in a particular way. My interpretation of anarchism is that it is primarily a view on the constitution of the human being which, entirely on the basis of that, opens out into the possibility for social change. In fact, as I have studied anarchism more and more, I have found it increasingly impossible to imagine how there could ever be any sort of widespread anarchist consciousness in public without conscious anarchist people. And that all starts within, with being what you are. If this means I make of anarchism a spirituality or a consciousness (and to some extent it does) then SO BE IT.



This leads me back to a point I have made several times before, however, this being that ANARCHISM ISN'T, FIRST OF ALL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC. There was a time, I will concede, when it mostly was. This is what the Kropotkins and the Bakunins and even the Malatestas cared about. But it wasn't all that Emma Goldman cared about. It wasn't all that Voltairine de Cleyre cared about. It wasn't all that so many others cared about who found their very beings illegal or outside the law, their very existence seemingly criminalised. So such exclusive concerns didn't even survive until the 20th century undisturbed. Historical anarchism, when you actually study its detail, very quickly splintered, if not shattered, into individual interpretations. Some joined organisations, yes, but many others didn't and determined anarchism would be for them what it meant to them – perhaps shooting the king or robbing banks or stealing from posh houses and sharing the booty with the poor. (All discussed in my book *Black Flag*.) I entirely agree people have a right to do that. I entirely agree, in fact, that some ignorant anarcho-capitalist who wants you to get into crypto and who has no knowledge whatsoever of the anarchism of the past, or its various values, has the right to his ill-informed opinions. Do I think he is right? No. Do I want to educate him? If I can. But, in the end, he can, and probably will, think what he likes. Anarchists have to recognise that this will ALWAYS be the case and that anarchism is not forcing all people to one view, the right view. There is actually already a name for that anyway: its called fascism. Its fascism, as Alan Moore points out in his description of it, which views society as the bundle of uniform twigs, a thing that is not allowed to be different, diverse, other, individual, original. Anarchism, on the other hand, is the philosophy of self-organising free spirits who grow wild. Like pirates. *Or, at least, it should be.*

This is why an anarchism of free spirits sees anarchism as as much an intellectual and moral phenomenon as it does a political and economic one. Should people be released

from authoritarian government? Absolutely. Will this be impossible unless we simultaneously release these same people from economic servitude? Of course. But the free spirit insists that you must also release people from moral servitude and intellectual servitude as well – these being internal masters which make your consciousness its slave. You must create free thinking people who are not bound to a uniform view if you then want them to go on to insist on their political and economic freedom. Otherwise you might be in a situation where you free the slaves – but then, having no idea how to operate for themselves, they simply wander back to their old masters. (Jesus had a story about that.)

The historic anarchist emphasis on education among anarchists is exactly what this is all about, in fact, for anarchists have always insisted that you can't just free people and, in fact, that they must be educated to such a point that they desire, and act towards, their own freedom. (Malatesta's "We anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves" will never not be relevant here.) The free spirit is one who knows all about this for they have reached that self-educational point and desire their own freedom; in fact, they insist on it. This is what classical anarchists imagined in general and the free spirit is all in favour of that. But this then means that we must stop harping on about an external politico-economic anarchism, as if this was all that anarchism was about, and realise that how people think and who people are is just as vital as, if not more vital than, this. Without free spirits, who are we expecting to free anyone from political and economic chains? If anarchists expect people to FREE THEMSELVES and to organise themselves socially then how can they do that unless they are free spirits?

The point here is that anarchism exists at all because, historically, there have been anarchists, people who were exactly self-organising. The material individual reality is the

important thing here which is to say, as Novatore did, that what really counts here is real people and their lives – not ideas, not goals, not beliefs: people. Let me regale you now with a couple of metaphorical pictures in regard to this before I rise to my ultimate point: First, imagine a highly coiffured garden tended by a person who clearly wants everything just so. Plants, bushes and shrubs are all perfectly placed according to a pre-determined plan, everything is subject to precise horticulture so it produces a perfectly symmetrical display, the lawn is cut with scissors so that the grass is an exact and uniform length. The result is a garden full of straight lines and pristine appearance where there is not so much as a stray leaf. Now imagine another garden grown wild. Nothing is the same in this garden, there are no straight lines and every living thing here grows uncoerced. Some plants are big, reaching out towards the sun, whilst others wither and die. Here, the dice fall as they may and no one is tending to everything so that it is just so. Each organism does the best that it can in its circumstances (together with others!), using whatever alliances it can make (and there are alliances made all throughout this garden, in fact). But the result does not look like anything a human being would design.

A second allegory. Imagine the world as a vast open prison. It shouldn't be too hard for in many places today you can't even raise your voice, slip off your clothes or act differently to how all the other people are acting before some policeman – an official one with a badge or one of the unofficial ones who have fallen in line with society's morals and dictates – steps in to coerce your behaviour. In this open prison where, as Sartre said, "Hell is other people", you have to watch yourself every step because someone is always ready to snitch on you to someone official whilst, in many public places, cameras of many different kinds stand ready to catch you doing something someone else has decided you shouldn't do. You were born into this prison and that you had leaders above you and laws to follow upon that birth was already decided and taken out of your hands. Now, all you

must do is obey. Yet, nevertheless, here and there in this open prison there are people who insist they are liberated. They refuse their voluntary servitude. They don't buckle under or get with the program. They don't accept that their lives were taken away from them, are subject to control by others, and that they are prisoners with a measure of freedom only by the grace of others. They declare their emancipation and that they will live free – up to and including if the police and prison guards come for them. They insist on creating their own context. They want, and act, to escape.

The free spirit here is, of course, a plant in the wild garden and the “prisoner” who declares their liberation - for the free spirit is, to use a further metaphor, the cat who refuses to be herded. Only such people can ever create “anarchism” because only the genuine and authentic interaction of free people (such as the historical pirates discussed above) can ever create an anarchism which is conceived of as the uncoerced freedom of the wilderness. The image of this anarchism is then precisely the wild garden and not the coiffured one – although there are several people who call themselves “organisational” or “social” anarchists who think the coiffured garden is an image of an anarchist future. I contradict them. Most strongly. I say they are deceiving themselves by confusing a kind of order with truly free self-organisation. I say that the only anarchism worth the name is a wild anarchism of lives lived and alliances forged in the midst of life on an ad hoc basis (just like a mycorrhizal network, in fact). Anarchism, then, is emancipation from external order which, in one way or another, is always going to be based on coercion or control. Whether this is hostile (as in the prison) or benevolent (as in the garden) does not really matter *for that it is coercion or control at all is the important thing*. So I am saying that we see a life as like a plant which just wants to grow as strong and as tall as it can in order to exist in good health rather than seeing it as the whole garden that – due to some controlling urge to order – needs to be planned and prodded into an entirely unnatural

symmetry. (I have, as an aside, always hated those big planned out gardens. Show me something growing wild, it is much better.) Anarchists are not gardeners, they are the plants. Anarchists are certainly not jailers, they should not even be prisoners. They insist on living free and independently. They insist on their self-organisation. A merry life and a short one!

So I deny, in the end, that anarchism is order or a will to organisation – as some others may suggest. This does not mean, incidentally, that anarchists cannot organise themselves. But “themselves” is the important word there and not “organise”: anarchy is SELF-ORGANISATION. Of course the achievement of certain goals, desirable goals no doubt, takes cooperation – but cooperation should always come from below as an act of will and never from above by pressure or manipulation. The free-spirited anarchist impulse is to grow wild, that which, in organisational terms, would be regarded as in a decentralised, unplanned way, because an anarchism of free spirits, of those who think for themselves and go their own way, will ALWAYS BE THE BEST DEFENCE AGAINST CENTRALISED CONTROL. ALL anarchists seek to defeat such centralised control so this is really a question of the best way to achieve that.

I submit, in that case, that this is not by creating anarchist structures and organisations and institutions which, in the end, are only new conduits to coerce and gerrymander outcomes. The free spirit trades letting things fall as they may for the ability to, in the words of Alan Moore from *V for Vendetta*, live a life of “Do As You Please”. Their life is a contingent one with no guarantees and not a wholly imaginary utopian future peace and harmony. It is the free spirit’s intuition that you cannot, can never, create such a thing on purpose and that, in wanting to, you only trade one kind of illegitimate coercion for another, one labelled “benevolent”. But benevolent according to who? No, says the free

spirit. Leave people to be really and genuinely free and let the rest take care of itself. Or, in Daoist terms, do nothing and nothing will be left undone. “Anarchism”, much less “anarchy”, is not something anarchists should set out to create; it is something that should form organically, all by itself, because of the actions and interactions of free spirits and free people. It is this entirely biological, natural metaphor that should be our guiding, and dancing, star. It is that which makes Golden Age pirates genuine participants in/of anarchy.

Now if we look at Saul Newman’s book *Postanarchism* from 2016 we immediately find it set (not unsurprisingly) in a contemporary context of Occupy actions, Antifa and anti-capitalist action, anti-racism actions and climate breakdown activism - things which may be said, in Newman’s words, to be matters of “an autonomous insurrection” that turns its gaze away from “the empty spectacle of sovereign politics” and asks after what it can do if people simply dissent and ignore the powers that be, setting their own agenda instead. It turns out that autonomy, as far as Saul Newman’s interpretation of postanarchism goes, is a very important component of it. In this interpretation, this new taste for autonomy is due to a crisis of liberal political representation which, at least in the most radical responses, entails a rejection of representation at all and a burning desire to speak and act for oneself. This leads to “networked and rhizomatic forms of political life” and “subterranean movements of resistance spreading spontaneously” as well as “the invention of alternative autonomous political spaces and practices” and “the desire for autonomous and sustainable life which no longer bears the imprint of the state.” Although they are definitely not anarchists, modern groups such as Extinction Rebellion or Black Lives Matter would also fall under the auspices of such ideas blowing in the wind to the extent that they also acknowledge that the powers that be are a political dead end and must now be subverted instead.

Yet besides a realisation in some that politics has done all it can, or all it ever could, to deliver on its phantom promises of equality, liberty and justice – turning into the capitalist’s policeman instead and resulting in a loss of confidence in the state – there is also a companion issue for those who would do something about it. This is that the once revolutionary idea of simply taking over the state and running it on better lines (i.e. in a Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or even just a broadly communist revolutionary way) today seems more unrealistic than ever too. Indeed, Newman himself goes further when he states that “the fantasy of seizing control of the state, as though it were a benign instrument to be commanded by a revolutionary will, is no longer plausible, if indeed it ever was. Radical movements today turn their backs on the state rather than seeking to command it, and they reject centralized structures of leadership and party discipline” (just, in fact, as pirates once did).

Here Newman both makes an observation – which may be true or not – but also offers a preference for “an anarchistic ethos in which autonomy and self-organization are the key elements”. Stated simply and repeatedly, implicitly and explicitly throughout his book, this is a reasoned preference for a very pirate-like insurrectionary existence over a revolutionary goal. But what does “postanarchism” have to do with this? What even is “postanarchism”? I’m glad you asked for I’m about to explain. Newman describes postanarchism as “an anarchism of the here and now, unencumbered by th[e] revolutionary narrative” – by which he means the formerly revolutionary narrative of those 100-150 years before when “the classical anarchists” were alive who wanted a revolution to overthrow the government and run things themselves. This idea is an example of what is known as a “metanarrative” (a story inside which all the other stories fit – Christianity or evolution would be examples of others) and postanarchism, being, as it is, anarchism as interpreted by poststructuralist or postmodernist thought, does not

like metanarratives (since they tend to act as static external authorities). In fact, in the words of one of the primary postmodernism explainers, Jean-Francois Lyotard, it has “incredulity towards metanarratives” – it finds them unbelievable and implausible. So, for the postanarchist, the very idea of a revolution being the guiding story inside which we understand everything we do is just too hard to swallow. Thus, with this incredulity towards metanarratives, it necessitates some rethinking on the part of the postanarchist and I am discussing it here because I believe that in many (but not all) respects this is instructive for the contemporary anarchist (or pirate) too.

Here metanarratives Newman takes on, for example, include the idea of a human subject – currently being split apart and utterly fragmented in contemporary thought as ever greater numbers of gender and sex expressions are created and lived out which dissipate not only authoritarian ideas of these things but make irrelevant class politics and identity politics too. If there is no human subject then how can it be ordered and arranged in certain ways with any authenticity or credibility? Such fracturing dissolves any authority over the subject that now seems not to exist as a result. The aforementioned idea of a revolution is also tackled head on and found hard to believe in by Newman. Here he suggests that, instead of wanting to be the power, we should simply ignore the power by becoming autonomous. Newman also wants to interrogate power (a pre-eminent poststructuralist concern) and ask after how power seems to attract our own self-abrogation (that is, how we will our own coercion which, when you think about it, is the opposite of piracy). Newman describes postanarchism as a result as “a politics and ethics of indifference to power”. Here the key to this, thanks to the poststructuralist undermining which Newman engages in, is that we are always already free and that “the secret of power is its own non-existence”. You will, no doubt, want me to explain these things too so here goes.



In his final chapter of *Postanarchism* Saul Newman states that:

*"To the extent that postanarchism is still a form of anarchism, it is an anarchism understood not as a certain set of social arrangements, or even as a particular revolutionary project, but rather as a sensibility, a certain ethos or way of living and seeing the world which is impelled by the realization of the freedom that one already has."*

I find this instructive for it is basically what I was saying in my anarchist commentary from the beginning in which I offered an anarchism of values, virtues and ethics to my reader, not for a single second realising that this might be compatible with something called "postanarchism". Neither did I there particularly draw out the insurrectionary rather than the revolutionary consequences of this although I did, I think, emphasize that the anarchism I was putting forward was a matter of "who we are" changing the world rather than it being a matter of certain, pre-ordained actions being carried out according to a pre-determined plan and then all putting our feet up, anarchy achieved, once it had been carried out. Such a conception of possible future events always instinctively struck me as thoroughly implausible which is why, in the past, I wrote against the idea of anarchisms of a place or plan and in favour of an anarchism of values and virtues, a who we are changing the world from our insides out.

What Saul Newman does to this idea of mine in *Postanarchism* is explain it and make sense of it. Substituting the idea of insurrection for revolution (the latter being a metanarrative, the former a state of constant becoming), he argues that anarchism (as postanarchism) then becomes "a form of self-transformation and the assertion of one's indifference to power." This is a matter of one's autonomy, one's self-actualisation (the latter a favourite expression of mine), one's ownness (for Newman does indeed rely on

the thought of Max Stirner quite a lot in explaining this). As Newman also says in his final chapter, "If one were to ask what postanarchism wants, the only answer that can be given is autonomy." Autonomy Newman understands broadly as "self-government", a postanarchist interpretation of the classical anarchist anti-authoritarian impulse. It is as if to say we answer the narrative of classical anarchism, and its consequences, by coming to the conclusion that autonomy or self-government are the values we hold dear instead.

But let's tackle this point about metanarratives at this point head on. It is Newman's suggestion that anarchism, certainly in its classical period, "has been shaped by the Enlightenment narratives of emancipation, progress and rationalism; it was at once a revolutionary programme and a science of social relations." This is to say that it took the grand narratives of liberalism and, essentially, just swapped out liberalism's values (and means) for its own – but without changing the overall story. It was, thus, still about "a universalizing metanarrative of human freedom" or a "social revolution" which affected everyone equally. The totality of all human relations would be affected by it as we, in theory, went from liberal world to anarchist world. This was all very rational, scientific and positivist and, in more recent times, the thinking of someone like Murray Bookchin could have been a representative of it too.

But is this actually very realistic – or even desirable? Should we all be thinking the same, want the same things or the same outcomes, live in a universal world of universally acknowledged truths and values? Should there be "one dominant, coherent understanding of society"? Is the idea of one universally shared consciousness a truth or a lie – even if its an "anarchist" one? Aren't there, in fact, other truths – such as contingency, indeterminacy, plurality, diversity – which show this "one size fits all" conception of human existence to be a lie? And, if that is so, wouldn't the more authentically anarchist

way be to honour these truths and leave the metanarrative of a constructed unity to those who believe in such fairy stories? If there is no one truth – and postanarchism insists on this most strongly – then shouldn't we be living lives, and organising ourselves as those who live lives, that are, intellectually speaking, "groundless and without predetermined ends"? (Recall my two allegories a few pages back.)

Newman asserts that we should and informs us that the postanarchist mode of being is "a form of action and thought in the present moment rather than a specific revolutionary project". So, taking on board a postanarchist cast of thought, we are not trying to instigate a revolution which instantiates our own values upon the world. That, in fact, is what the capitalists and authoritarians (today's representatives of the liberal Enlightenment) are trying to do and so why should we have ever thought we should be acting or thinking like them? I have always tried to emphasise and re-emphasise that anarchists do not think or act like their non-anarchist fellow human beings: they have their own, quite specific, ethos instead. So, consequently, it just seems bizarre to me that anyone would ever think an entirely different ethos results in the same actions, patterns of thought or results. If you have different values, as Nietzsche tried to explain in his own eventual project of a "transvaluation of all values", then everything will be different and you will not end up living the same lives by other means. You will have changed life itself. So in a postanarchist interpretation of anarchism there can be no "project of projects" which is our aim for the world. We do not, and should not, want "an anarchist revolution" rather, like the pirates, we should be content simply to live self-determined lives. Saul Newman puts it like this:

*"rather than thinking of anarchism as a distinct project, I find it more useful today to see it in terms of a certain mode of thought and action through which relations of domination, in*

*their specificity, are interrogated, contested and, where possible, overturned. What is central for me in anarchism is the idea of autonomous thinking and acting which transforms contemporary social spaces in the present sense, but which is at the same time contingent and indeterminate in the sense of not being subject to predetermined logics and goals. This does not mean that anarchism should not have ethical principles or be impassioned by certain ideals – but, rather, that it should not, and perhaps any longer cannot, see itself as a specific programme of revolution and political organization. This does not mean, of course, that all projects should be abandoned, but rather that there is no Project of projects that determines all the others."*

I think that this is exactly right as well as being honest to the spirit, if not always the thought worlds, of the classical anarchists too. So, in short, imposing an anarchist revolution on the world – assuming we ever could which is probably very silly – is not an anarchist thing to want to do. What anarchists (hopefully) want to do is express their autonomy and engage in self-government – in all the freely associational ways anarchists have previously and currently dreamed of, set apart from a metanarrative to which they are all bound. In fact, it is only thinking in this way which leads to the contingent, indeterminate, plural and diverse world the anarchist imagines in the first place. You can't get there via a one size fits all revolution, a plan to which all the anarchists are working (even if they may often, quite spontaneously, find that they want the same things and so cooperate in their achieving). You can only leave them alone to work out their own values in their own lives and situations as they see fit. It is this that is anarchism. It is this the pirates instinctively understood.

Here an important thing to understand is what Newman describes as postanarchism's beginning with anarchy rather than having it as the end goal. This, in my terms, is a

beginning with anarchy, a state of existence in general, to which an anarchy-replicating, and anarchy-consistent, anarchism is the appropriate response. Newman himself thinks of this as something to do with our ontology (our being, who we are) and he regards such anarchy as “a form of autonomous thinking and acting”: we, in fact, are or become the anarchy and, from this position, live out the anarchy that we become in the world. This is a very important difference with more classical conceptions of anarchy labouring under the weight of the revolutionary metanarrative. It starts with the recognition that we are already free beings onto whom is projected an authoritarian and inauthentic narrative of our control, subservience and coercion. Most important to this view is the recognition that we are free and that, in my terms, anarchy already exists. What may not yet exist is our living according to anarchist values and virtues but our “autonomous thinking and acting” is how we instantiate this in the world as a result.

In order to do this we have a lot of rethinking to do for, to put it bluntly, all of the ways of thinking we have received as a result of the liberal Enlightenment have mindfucked us by making us subjects for its consumption and exploitation. (For myself I would think of anarchism pure and simple as fundamentally an activity of necessary rethinking. Anarchism is not new values from old ideas but new ideas mandating new values. As a result, it becomes impossible to think in the old ways any more and everything becomes, or must become, rethought.) One area where this is especially necessary is in thinking of the human subject itself and, consequently, Newman pays this some attention in *Postanarchism*. This is a vital area to discuss in relation to anarchism because who you think you are, and what you think of yourself as, is vitally important for what you can then do with it. For example, if you think all people are born slaves then it makes a big difference as opposed to if you think of them as born free instead. Millions of people in our human history were, in fact, enslaved exactly because white Europeans (amongst

others) thought of them as ontologically (that is, in their own very being) as different from themselves, people who were literally born slaves. Our world today, held in the sway of various guiding mentalities, subjectivises people all the time, classifying them this way and that and putting them into domesticated boxes by which to better control them.

Rather than as subjectivities, however, for reasons that will hopefully soon become apparent, Saul Newman wants to talk about “singularities”. Now it should not be lost on the science-interested of my readers that a singularity is a black hole. This you may find to be a useful metaphor as we move forward – especially given the imagined physical characteristics of black holes. We are, of course, now moving, as postanarchists, in post-revolutionary waters in which there are no more proles to be saved and no bourgeoisie to overcome. We are now, in Newman’s terms, about “ontological anarchy”, an anarchy of our being or becoming and we expressly START from this position rather than having it as our end or revolutionary goal. As a result, “there is no essential identity or universally recognized subject destined for emancipation.” This makes “the condition of life – insofar as it cannot be said to have any predetermined identity, pattern or telos - ... in its very essence ungovernable.” (“Essence” is unfortunate, if understandable, language for, as Newman would himself immediately concede, we postanarchists are not essentialists; we do not think that there are essences which are the central identities of things. There is nothing essential which makes you a man, woman, gay, trans, black, anarchist, catboi, fembot or anything else. There are only linguistic constructions and their associated ideas and the ways in which these interconnect to, and interrelate with, one another.) It is this Newman thinks of, instead, as a “singularity” and he glosses this idea as “self-creating subjects without fixed identity or calling.” This, in turn, results in more than a little contemporary interest, if this sort of thinking be taken as indicative of the times, in

anonymity (see the hacker group Anonymous as an example of this), fluidity and various forms of subjective undecidability or indeterminacy.

The point here is to reject classification (by powerful or dominant others), or being otherwise pinned down, in an act of creative self-actualisation. This is because, under the guiding liberal epistemology (an epistemology is a form of knowledge or guiding mode of thought), to be a subject, classified this way and that, “is at the same time to be subjected.” Here “The operation of power, combined with regimes of knowledge and truth – formations which are historically contingent – has the effect of producing different modes of subjectification, different ways we have of seeing ourselves.” It is by these means that we are then governed, i.e. through domesticating classifications which, to be blunt, we are not but which, nevertheless, we have been designated by others (most particularly by authority) to be in any case. This acts as a kind of discipline upon us as “the disciplinary effects of modern power operate on individual bodies and behaviours, while its biopolitical effects regulate and secure life at the broader level of the population.” Through classificatory practices the liberal state operates (by subjecting the individual in a double sense) in order to govern. What postanarchism does as a response, according to Newman, is then not simply refuse the government of the state but also refuse the subjectivity the state also wishes to impose in order to be able to govern in the first place. By talking about singularity instead of subjectivity, Newman hopes to encourage us to “life in excess of such [liberal] categories [of subjectivity].” This is because “we are inserted into an apparatus which seeks to capture every facet of existence and desire within its circuits – of consumption, communication, spectacle, hyper-visibility, idiotic enjoyment, endless and meaningless work, debt and constant insecurity – creating an unlimited dependency.” Neoliberalism, in which we are currently immersed, wants us dependent and controlled. As singularities, we begin to refuse its classificatory

domestication and become autonomous, (and perhaps even anonymous) self-governing beings. We assert, in Newman's terms, our ontological anarchy in ways that pirates did by forming their own communities with their own rules, designing their own flags of allegiances and codes of association.

This is, then, a practice of eluding a totalising control that is a metanarrative of subjectivity. Newman thinks of this as "the refusal of any kind of representable identity" or a "dis-identification." This is a practice of, as Newman quotes Michel Foucault, "to refuse who we are," i.e. what the guiding epistemology has designated us to be. We are, thus, Neo in *The Matrix* insisting to Agent Smith that our name is not Mr Anderson at all. We, autonomous, self-governing entities that we are, will decide for ourselves what we will be and, as singularities not subjectivities, refuse all outside designations or even their very possibility. We ignore power in this respect for we are our own power, our own being. We seek fluidity, we hunt indeterminacy, we embrace invisibility – anything to avoid the domesticating gaze of authority which wants to bag and tag us. We engage with the Void and, indeed, become it for this is the condition of our greatest freedom – just as, in fact, inside the matrix Neo can be anything. A singularity, then, is "a form of subjectivity which eschews strictly defined identities and creates for itself, in association with others, an autonomous space of existence" which, hopefully, goes on to become "a sort of open, amorphous community without identity or borders." This envisions, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, which Newman makes use of for his cause, "a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization."

Once again postanarchism, perhaps of all anarchisms, urges upon the anarchist the imperative to "Rethink! Rethink! Rethink!" for anarchism, if it is anything, is the practice of



rethinking the world. It must, thus, undo or rupture the world as previously conceived for its world is not that world. Such a world, as we should now expect, will not only refuse the identifications and subjectivities of the one it leaves behind but will also refuse to calculate in the same way or ways. It will be “a community of non-essence, non-immanence, defined not by any particular identity but by its own openness and finitude.” It won’t have a particular goal or end. It will simply be a community of open relations which leaves the idea of sovereign identities behind. To this extent, it won’t be the project, often seen being pursued by those discriminated against, of trying to get included in the list of acceptable subjectivities. *If subjectivity itself, in a liberal way of thinking, is thought illegitimate as a concept then it is made no more legitimate by designating yourself trans or pansexual or anything else. Postanarchistic thinking does away with the very idea of such essentialistic, sovereign identities, trans as well as cis, pan as well as heterosexual, and, in fact, “makes impossible closure or totality of any kind.” Much like liberal feminism is faulty in thinking that if we get female bosses we have solved some feminist problem, it is equally faulty to imagine that if our particular subjectivity gets “accepted” that we have, thereby, invented any sort of genuine equality, or made any kind of progress, at all. In fact, we have only extended the domesticating subjection of subjectivities.*

Enter Max Stirner. Stirner was a radical anti-essentialist who was horrified by the idea of being inhabited by variously invented “spooks” and abstractions such as “Man,” “Humanity,” “Society”, etc. We may, in some respects, think of Stirner as a Nietzsche before Nietzsche for, like this more illustrious philosophical thinker, Stirner is a theorist of the decline and deconstruction of metanarratives and their correspondingly imagined authority. He particularly does not wish to see God destroyed only to be reinvented as Man. Stirner is an anti-humanist who exposes liberalism and humanism as reinventions of

the Divine and decries such a religion of Humanity. Where such liberal humanists look and see a whole host of abstractions which haunt them – ideals which articulate their existence – Stirner sees only “emptiness”. Stirner does not think that people can be examples of abstractions such as “Man” and, more to the point, he does not think they should want to be – in acts of self-imprisonment. Stirner, like Foucault as mentioned above, is about “refusing who we are” too. He is against fictional commonalities which are subsequently easily domesticated and institutionalized. Stirner thinks of himself, and others, not as abstractions, examples of an invented spook or class, but as concrete personalities, examples of themselves, egos, unique. (Hence the title of his only major work, normally rendered *The Ego and Its Own* in English, but equally valid, and a better translation, when translated as *The Unique and Its Property*.)

As Newman himself explains, “in taking the ego as the only ontological reality, [Stirner] is seeking to undermine the authority of transcendental concepts and their hold over us and inviting people to affirm themselves, in their uniqueness and singularity, as their only cause. Stirner’s philosophy of egoism is a programme of autonomy, or what he calls ‘ownness’.” This, however, is not “individualism” which is a liberal, subjective category of thinking. Here what is important, as Newman extrapolates, is that “this singular ego is not an essence of any kind – it is not an individual with a set of properties and interests; rather, it is a kind of nothingness, what Stirner calls a ‘creative nothing’, in a constant state of flux and becoming, consuming itself and creating itself anew.” It is in this sense that Stirner says of his own idea that “no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me; they are only names.” This means, as Saul Newman concludes, that “To be singular is to be undefinable, and, as I have suggested above, to be undefinable, or unrepresentable, is to be ungovernable.”

By now we find ourselves deep into Saul Newman's postanarchist construction and, breaking from the organisation he has pursued in his own book, I want to harness the rest of my comments about it under the heading of "insurrection", the title he gives to the third chapter of *Postanarchism* and something that might be seen as indicative of free spirits themselves. This, it will soon be seen, ends up being a call back to Diogenes' own insurrection against Greek society in my first chapter for, if you have been following along, you might imagine that, in some way, all the various essays of this book somehow inform each other and create a coherent intellectual idea or whole. If, then, the postanarchist insurrection and Diogenes' insurrection against civilisation in ancient Greece were, in some sense, "the struggle for autonomous life", and if that was also something pertinent to the anarchists and pirates in between those two at the beginning and end of my book, then it may be thought that we have been discussing related people, times and places all along, those who can inform an understanding of each other.

First, however, let me return to the contemporary incredulity towards the revolutionary metanarrative, for this certainly plays its part. I don't know if the figures from a classical anarchist past genuinely imagined governmental overthrow was a realistic possibility but, being bitingly honest with myself, it doesn't seem remotely likely or possible to me. *This is not an admission of defeat*. Perhaps in 1917 in Russia or in 1936 in Spain people allowed themselves to dream but, as we now know, both dreams turned to nightmares and we later anarchists must, necessarily, be chastened as a result. But, more than the possibility of revolution, which itself seems vanishingly small, there is the question of the desirability of revolution.

This is where the postanarchist, such as Saul Newman, notes that "the revolution always aims at the founding of a new political order, a new state, and, as the anarchists argued, it

[i]s naïve in the extreme to believe that this would simply ‘wither away’ of its own accord once the immediate aims of the revolution had been achieved.” This is to say that the idea of revolution, as anarchists have conceived it, is itself a fantasy devoid of real world consequences and connotations. You don’t have a revolution and then everything is better. There will never be a day, or a time period, when the world changes from bad to good or oppressive to cooperative. You create a real and, in many senses, unknown world as a result of a revolution in which all you really know is that its guaranteed not everyone will want what you want. *The problem with revolution, in fact, is that the thought of it is itself not revolutionary. It imagines an anarchist world only as an anarchist version of a non-anarchist world, a liberal or neoliberal world. And that won’t do at all.*

The classical anarchists, however, were not totally blind to this. They wanted “the total abolition of politics”. They were interested in “genuinely autonomous, decentralized and participatory mass organizations.” It is in this respect that Newman concedes that maybe these classical anarchists carried with them a notion of insurrection as “an autonomous form of political mobilization and practice which sets itself apart from the state – which does not seek state power for itself but actually embodies its dissolution.” This, however, is not just a matter of rejecting the old (in terms of material apparatus and organisation as well as in terms of its thinking) but of also embracing the new – of thinking and acting differently. To this extent, the postanarchist disavows “revolutionary dogmatism” and institutes an insurrection which “relies on informal groups of anarchists, organized on the basis of affinity, who intervene in specific situations without these actions being overdetermined by the idea of the immanent revolution – in other words, without the expectation that such actions will lead to the social revolution.” This is a major shift of emphasis if “classical anarchism” is deemed to be possessed in any way by the spook of “revolution”. Yet it is a shift that came before the vast majority of classical anarchists, if

this is so, since Newman links it back to Stirner in *The Unique and Its Property* in 1844, as the following quotation suggests:

*"Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or status, the state or society, and is accordingly a political or social act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established."*

About this, Newman has the following to say:

*"The revolution works to transform external social and political conditions and institutions – in this sense, there is little difference between the Marxist 'political' revolution and anarchist 'social' revolution. The insurrection, by contrast, is aimed at one's own self-transformation (it starts 'from men's discontent with themselves'); it involves placing oneself above external conditions and constraints, whereupon these constraints simply disintegrate. It starts from the affirmation of the self, and the political consequences flow from this."*

This, in the postanarchist vocabulary, is recognisably a form of what I myself was saying in previous books I have written about anarchy when I spoke about values and virtues and it

starting with our own self-actualisation which is itself a self-transformation. But what I didn't know in the past was that, in Stirner and Newman's terms, I was actually talking about personal insurrection, about being the insurrection in this act of self-actualisation according to identifiably anarchist values and virtues. For, in both cases, my own work and Newman's postanarchism here, such activity "eschews the idea of an overarching project of emancipation or social transformation; freedom is not the end goal of the insurrection but, rather, its starting point." *We might not all be free until everyone is free but the lesson here is that the freedom begins when you free yourself.* It is, as Newman states, "the affirmation of self over... conditions, as if to say: power exists but it is not my concern; I refuse to let it constrain me or have any effect on me; I refuse power's power over me."

This, rather than leading to the political quietism of which Marx and Engels subsequently accused Stirner, is a refusal of self-abdication in the face of power to which many succumb, being dominated and coerced as they are supposed (from the position of authority) to be and, instead, a recognition that power doesn't actually exist except as a relationship (as Foucault also seems to suggest). As Newman adds here, "we need to understand power not as a substance or a thing, but as a relationship which we forge and renew everyday through our actions and our relations with others." We can destroy power by creating new relationships (which, as I argue in my work on the historical Jesus of Nazareth, is exactly what he was doing in becoming a destitute beggar, with others, on purpose) and, so Newman suggests, if we create "alternative and more autonomous relations" for ourselves then the result just might be "the disintegration of state power." In fact, I have pretty much argued this myself in writing from the past such as *Guerrilla Mind* in which I said that if we lived according to the principles of mutual aid, rather than capitalist finance, then we would change the world (because we have changed the relationships).

So, in this respect, “the insurrection signifies a withdrawal from the game of power and counter-power altogether – indeed, an indifference to power. Its focus is on the transformation of the self and its immediate relation to others, and on the development of autonomous ways of living which seek to avoid the trap that power has laid for us.” There is, as I already forewarned in coming to this section of my chapter, an obvious, and already mentioned, example of this in this book in the person of Diogenes. It is an interesting (and, as far as I am aware, unanswerable) question what Diogenes and his Cynic colleagues thought they were doing being conspicuously poor and outspoken in public in the Hellenistic world. Did they, for example, imagine that the denizens of Athens, Corinth and the like would all become Cynics like them? Was their goal comrades and a mass movement? If so, they were SPECTACULARLY unsuccessful as a result for almost nobody was an active Cynic. Others suggest that the Cynics were public educators, perhaps also the conscience of their societies, and there is certainly historical scope to see this as realistic. But how about interpreting Diogenes, instead, as an example of anarchist insurrection in a Hellenistic milieu? If it is true, as Newman intimates, that “The insurrection is a withdrawal not only from the political field – that is to say, the formal field of political institutions and systems of power – but also from the economic field” then Diogenes and the Cynics certainly seem to fit the bill, given what we know about them. They exhibited “a refusal of the life of debt, consumption and financial control”; they imposed “the life of necessity and survival” upon the political realm of their day. Diogenes himself refused the political institutions, mocked the cultural festivals and even devalued the currency, so we are told.

Of course, there is also a poststructuralist reading of Diogenes and it comes from Michel Foucault and Newman uses it to argue that Diogenes was “an example of the genuine philosophical life, in which the courage of truth and the ethics of existence were

embodied in every gesture and act, in one's daily life and activities... Th[is] ethical life was also a militant life in the sense that it pitted itself against the norms, mores and institutions of existing society and sought to break radically with them...The lesson of Diogenes, then, may be that, to do politics differently, we must learn to live differently and embody politics in life and life in politics." I myself, as an amateur student of Diogenes in particular, find this to be an authentic reading of the Dog but it points up in its consequences, as Newman goes on to say in the context of a postanarchist insurrection, that "The only way that we can free ourselves ultimately from the economic system that enslaves us – through debt and endless, meaningless work – is if we come to no longer desire it, if we refuse the fetishism of commodities and disinvest our desires from the capitalist way of life and from the psychic economy of guilt that arises with constant indebtedness." We are not taught that anyone taught Diogenes to be the way he was (the unclear connection to Antisthenes aside) and so we must assume that it was something about his interpretation of life itself which led to his manifestation as a deliberately destitute critic of politics, economy and culture living his own insurrection whilst on full public display.

Diogenes, as such, manifested his own "autonomous life of self-government" and, in that, we see a connection with pirates and a justification for him popping up in a book about them. (Both Cynics and pirates, in fact, wagered their own lives on their beliefs and the actions they carried out as a result of them.) Yet, coming back to Max Stirner, we need to ask what an autonomous life of freedom and insurrection might actually be. The problem with freedom, as Stirner had already suggested, is that it is itself an abstraction whilst also only ever being someone's particular version of freedom that can be instantiated, becoming, in effect, "a new domination". Therefore, as Newman ascertains from Stirner:



*"freedom must be left to the 'unique one' to determine for him or herself. It should be seen as ongoing elaboration of individual autonomy rather than a general political and social goal – freedom as a singular practice, unique to the individual, rather than a universally proclaimed ideal and aspiration. Freedom, in other words, must be divested of its abstractions and brought down to the level of the unique one."*

This kind of freedom is then self-ownership, self-mastery or, as I have already indicated I prefer, self-actualisation. Stirner's own preference was to talk of "ownness" where "Ownness is a way of restoring to the individual his or her capacity for freedom, of reminding the individual that s/he is already free in an ontological sense, rather than seeing freedom as a universal goal to be attained for humanity." *My freedom, in other words, and as an insurrection, must be my own. It must be an autonomy.*

A further part of this insurrectionary actualisation of the self is in what Newman labels "voluntary inservitude". This begins with the idea, posited by Étienne de la Boétie in his book *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, that, to quote Newman, "all forms of power [a]re essentially sustained, indeed created, by our voluntary submission." This evolves into an argument that material power exists essentially because we submit to it, cooperate with it, etc., and that without this it would struggle to exist at all. Such an argument might also be seen to support the view that, in some sense, we will our own domination or, perhaps, have been educated, habituated, into willing it. The consequence of this is that power would struggle to express itself so deliberately and purposefully without our (coerced) cooperation or even desired acquiescence. Newman develops this line of thinking into an analysis of culture in general when he says:

*"in thinking about freedom today and its centrality to any politics of emancipation, we seem to arrive at a dead end. Not only is freedom an increasingly opaque and ambiguous concept – which is why I have suggested that 'ownness' might be a more useful category – but it is not at all clear that people actually want it. On the contrary, the most superficial glance at our contemporary world seems to reveal a desire not for freedom but for authority, for a new Master. How else does one explain the electoral success of all kinds of reactionary, authoritarian and even fascist political movements or the return of the most noxious fundamentalisms and reactionary ideologies? Is there not a clamouring for more police powers, more punitive law and order measures, tougher action against 'illegal' migrants and certain minorities, more restrictive regimes of border control, more intensive surveillance, and so on?"*

*This would be what Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia called 'micro-fascism': a kind of authoritarianism and desire for one's own repression that permeates the social body, infiltrating everyday habits, behaviours and practices, and inhabiting the politics of both the right and the left. Indeed, historical fascism itself is something which might in large part be explained by this phenomenon of voluntary servitude."*

Newman puts this another way when he goes on to say:

*"In other words, such regimes are conditional upon a particular form of obedience – not one generated primarily by fear or coercion but, rather, by freedom. We obey freely through our everyday patterns and rituals of behaviour and consumption – shopping, voting, communicating and enjoying in normalized ways, and even in 'abnormal' ways. It is through the continuous repetition of these habits and behaviours that power is sustained."*

This essentially means that, in such ways, we no longer need tyrants threatening our lives to physically coerce our pained collusion with the interests of power. Instead, we have been schooled into willing them for ourselves, canonised, as they are, as “normal” or “a quiet life” or “minding your own business” or “not getting involved”. And so “at least in formally democratic societies – there is no longer any figure of the tyrant who might otherwise serve as a cover or excuse for our cowering submission to neoliberal forms of economic and political power.” This is what is called our “voluntary servitude” but it is a problem for those with the ideas of a classical anarchism in their head, as Newman explains, because:

*“Anarchism above all is a philosophy of human freedom and emancipation based on an essentially optimistic view of human capacities for rational and moral action. Once power was destroyed, freedom would reign. Yet, this narrative of emancipation, like many others, encounters the central deadlock of human desire – the voluntary servitude and love of submission which thwarts these revolutionary aspirations.”*

Thus, we find ourselves with a question: how can we be the insurrection if we all too easily will our own submission, having become habituated to it? Newman decides to read La Boétie’s text, with its possibly pessimistic conclusions for human beings, in an emancipatory way. He says that:

*“If we have freely chosen servitude, if we willingly participate in our own domination without the need for coercion, then this means that all power, even if it appears to bear down upon us, is essentially an illusion, one of our own making. If, in other words, we have created the tyrant in our act of submission to him, this means that the tyrant has no real power.”*

The conclusion Newman then comes to is that “All power is only our power” and that “domination is only possible through our continuing submission, the continual offering of ourselves to power.” We must, in other words, “emancipate ourselves from our own servitude”, from the illusion of the emperor’s new clothes, and Newman sees this as something compatible with his earlier thoughts about insurrection (as opposed to the revolution) in that it “does not launch an assault on power but is simply an affirmation of oneself over power.” By refusing to acknowledge power (something Leo Tolstoy credits to Jesus of Nazareth in his teaching about turning the other cheek or going the extra mile in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 5), we destabilise its very existence. We refuse to be dominated. And that makes a difference.

Indeed, according to Newman, both Stirner and de la Boétie may be read as concluding that “power does not exist”. This, of course, is not to say that it cannot have real or material effects. It means that power has no power over us if we refuse to let it have any. We can, as it were, stand unbowed, unclaimed, unclassified and undomesticated by it. Power, in fact, is only a relation, one we can acquiesce in the face of or refuse. And so “we should think of power not in terms of mastery or domination but, rather, as an unstable, impermanent set of relations and interactions.” This is then to say that we always already in fact have our own freedom and that, in keeping it, we refuse the relation of domination by power. Our “voluntary inservitude”, our insurrection, is then in refusing to give up our freedom, refusing to be dominated and exploited by authority, and choosing to be self-governing and autonomous – which is exactly what the pirates did in acts of desertion and mutiny at the risk of their own lives. We then display what Stirner calls “ownness” and I call our self-actualisation. Here we make our own values rather than being coerced into the games of others where power, money, sensuality and an obsession with trinkets and other external objects can be used to control us. In this, “The important point... is that

freedom is our ever-present possibility and, indeed, our ontological condition, our point of departure" rather than something we are trying to achieve. We begin as free people who own our own beings and then, in a refusal of submission to power or authorities, we, as Nietzsche says, "become who we are." This is our insurrection in every sense of the term.

It is in this sense that, to begin rounding up my appraisal of Newman's postanarchism, this essay and this book, this is anarchism in that "it is an anarchism understood not as a certain set of social arrangements, or even as a particular revolutionary project, but rather as a sensibility, a certain ethos or way of living and seeing the world which is impelled by the realization of the freedom that one already has." This is very much compatible with my understanding of anarchism which is about who you are and who you are becoming as a person possessed of an existential freedom, the ability to self-educate, and the virtues and values that you hold dear in a process I describe as *self-actualisation in relationship with others*. This has perhaps sometimes all sounded rather too individualistic but it is not and a social context for this is always assumed as opposed to a bunker where one hides oneself away to self-actualise. In fact, such processes and practices can only take place in a social world in which one actualises oneself in tandem and interaction with others – a form of *social egoism*. If the guiding metaphors of a postanarchism are the rhizome and the network then this implies intercourse with other nodes on the net in an ongoing way and the necessity of such interaction for the operation of the whole. I, personally, very much believe this to be the case in a context in which the freedom of all supports and maintains the freedom of the one.

But, as I hope my discussion of postanarchism guided by Saul Newman has shown after the discussion of free spirits, none of this can take place if we are not each in possession

of our own "autonomy". It is in each of us acting in our own freedom, something we already possess if only we will realise it, that a social freedom becomes possible. Here Saul Newman gives us a warning in that "if we think of autonomy as something that is granted to us by the state, then it can be very easily taken out of our hands." Instead, as ungovernable singularities rather than "governable identities", we must insist that we govern ourselves and practice such self-government. As Newman explains, involving Stirner in his explanation once more:

*"I am my own only when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered either by sensuality or by anything else (God, man, authority, law, state, church)'. We should note here that, for Stirner, whether the threat to one's autonomy is internal (sensuality) or external (institutions like law, state and church), the danger is the same: institutions can become internalized compulsions, fixed ideas, whose submission to which we come to desire; and internalized passions and desires are always in danger of materializing into external systems of domination which threaten to engulf us."*

Thus is seen that "autonomy", "self-government", "singularity", "insurrection" and "voluntary inservitude" are all important, and interconnecting, concepts/practices engaged in this action of what Newman calls "self-constitution", an essential start point for any society or community that would ever wish to become "anarchist", anti-authoritarian in the classical tradition of anarchism or self-sustaining such as pirates attempted to be and become. It begins, necessarily, with who you are, with what you are becoming, and, as Newman suggests:

*"We should understand this in properly poststructuralist terms: the self is not an essence but a series of becomings, an ongoing project of self-constitution without any clear end or*

*telos. From this perspective autonomy should be seen not as a state one reaches, such that one is truly and finally autonomous – for what could this be but the very end of subjectivity itself? – but, rather, as a series of agonistic practices carried out in the context of constraints and limitations, both external and internal."*

This can sound very simplistic – as in when Newman comments that “freedom is simply a matter of willing differently”. Hopefully, having read the several pages of this essay before this, you can see why Saul Newman would now say that. Yet we must hold at the forefront of our minds Newman’s ontological point here, just as I have previously insisted, that there is more context to our anarchism than the fact of our desire to live free of the encumbrances and coercions of state, property and capital. My own greater context was not, at first, expressed as our ever-present ontological freedom, as it is with Newman, but as the fact of a universe which exists, as a kind of harmony, yet completely uncoerced. I think that, in our own ways, Newman and I are not so far apart. I accept Newman’s “ontological freedom” as a poststructuralist explanation of my more existential idea. Both are ways of describing the human condition (and conditioning), if using differing vocabularies. Both involve setting our freedom to be free in wider contexts and carving out autonomous spaces by engaging in practices likely to increase and actualise our own autonomy and further the project (but not the project of projects!) of an “aristocracy of all”. As Newman suggests, in this project “ethical self-discipline and practices of oneness are key themes here” as we travel on the way to “rhizomatic associations” and “autonomous relations” in a universe beyond coercing.

Once again, in closing, I see the pirates of the Golden Age as examples and models of that. How else do you expect such people as just described were going to look in reality? Pirates were those who refused, and often violently shook off, their forced servitude and

had no intention of volunteering it. If they simply wanted anything at all, then they wanted their autonomy, an autonomy, furthermore, that was far from inimical to sociality. They both valued personal autonomy and created social autonomies as well. They further looked askance at the lawful authorities of the world and dared to defy them. As David Graeber has previously put it, they determined to live their own lives and left it to others to decide if they would try to stop them. They then seem to have modelled the postanarchy ideas of Saul Newman, and put in question the purely liberal concerns of those such as Stephen Snelders and Gabriel Kuhn I discussed in earlier essays, at the same time. If anarchy, or postanarchy, is in fact not a world revolution, but a more immanent and permanent insurrection, then the pirates were perfect examples of that in what they did and how they chose to live. They are the once living, breathing and daring example that one makes a new world by creating it with and amongst like-minded and free spirited colleagues for yourselves by your own, autonomous direct action.



## **The Pirate Song of Jolly Roger and the Community of Free Spirits**

Did you once hear tell, in the days of yore, of the dogs who went to sea  
Holes in their pants, liberty on their minds, vowing never to bend the knee?  
So they form'd up crews of their own free men and drew up plans of battle  
And woe to all those who should meet these men for their guns shall make you rattle!

Masters no more shall their captains be, neither tyrants, kings nor foes  
And if ye strike us about the head then we'll punch you on the nose!  
For we're now brothers of the sea and we fight for Old Roger together  
And we trust in each other eternally, whatever the climate or weather.

So hoist the sails and stow the liquor and let the musicians play  
As we wend our way across the waves and attempt to seize the day  
We'll go huntin' booty in the blue and we'll give no quarter fast  
Unless ye heave to when ye see the flag that flies atop our mast.

It declares us men of a devilish crew who sail under flag of the Devil!  
And we serve him well and cordially as we seek ye to dishevel!  
We seek out loot to a tune on the flute, determination in our eyes  
And we don't care a fig for your captain or rig for we all of ye despise!

With cutlass and dagger we will verily swagger as we cut through the waves like a knife  
We seek treasure and crew from your dour retinue and might even have your wife!  
But if ye should resist, or raise violent fist, once thinking cross the waves to flee  
We will hunt you like dogs and your bodies will flog and we'll act with overweening glee!

Then we'll take what we want, scarce having a thought for the laws of men in their pride  
For amongst our crews there are no laws or rules cos the men for themselves decide!  
With our articles and our customs few we have learned to fight as one  
And best of all is the sound of our gun and sailing away when we're done!

Then we'll find some shore and we'll drink and we'll whore all hours Old Roger sends  
For what is better in this struggle of a life than booze and whores and friends?  
So we'll dance a jig and the wine we'll swig and make merry on the shore  
Till we all fall down in the stupor of sleep, doing nothing but loudly snore!

And next day we'll be roused by the fight in our hearts and desire to rove once more  
But don't ye think for a minute my man that the wine will cease to pour!  
For the sons of Old Roger do verily have a will to battle and rage  
At the comp'ny of men who rule by the lash and constant withhold the wage

For we were once of this comp'ny of men and did feel the lick of whip  
And the orders of officers, cruel and unjust, and the tortures on a captain's ship  
But with courage and heart and playing our part we worked for our freedom true  
We deserted and mut'nied happily and started many a coup!

For a life on the sea and to live to be free, yo ho and a bottle of rum  
And friends you can trust and barrels of lust and a squeeze of a peachy bum!  
Our lives in our hands, what more to demand but fair wind and sail to set  
As we take our chances heartily – and living in no man's debt?

So load the cannon with grapeshot now and arm yourselves for war  
For we set to sea with our pistols and glee and a devilish roguish corps  
Of men who fight with the lust and the life of those who own themselves  
Who dress like lords and heave on cords and cling tightly to their helms

We'll come like the waves crashing in on ye and will no man save or spare  
We'll swing and we'll slash with our swords and the lash for about ye we don't care!  
So surrender ye fools, put down your tools, heave to and cease your flight  
For ne'er ye best our company, power'd on by Old Roger's might!

We are those possessed mightily of free spirits and we love our terrorism!  
It manifests our freedom, see, and our social egoism  
We cherish relational affluence and communities of desire  
Cooperative promiscuity, taking liberties to inspire!

Our amorous camaraderie and communal self-actualisation  
Our socio-erotic exchange and constant intoxication!  
We form a counter community and despise your authority and law  
We prize more highly affinity as we drink and we whore and we war!

So raise a glass and sharpen your sword, set sail, fair winds to find  
A prize and a battle and a fight to seek and freedom on your mind  
Ne'er were there men who sailed these seas more willing to pronounce  
That nothing beats the liberty of men who measure their prey by the ounce!

(The picture on the following page is of Captain Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts.)



